THE
BLACK
GOWN
BY
RUTH
HALL

Mailed
Sent to R. R. L. Oct. 1926

REFERENCE LIBRARY OF

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

2 PARK STREET, BOSTON

NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THE SHELVES
EXCEPT BY PERMISSION OF
THE LIBRARIAN

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Boston Public Library

https://archive.org/details/blackgown00hall

By Ruth Hall.

IN THE BRAVE DAYS OF OLD. A Story of Adventure in the Days of King James the First. With Frontispiece. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

THE BOYS OF SCROOBY. With Frontispiece. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

THE BLACK GOWN. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK.

THE BLACK GOWN

BY

RUTH HALL

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1900

COPYRIGHT, 1900, BY RUTH HALL

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

"A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?"

TO VIOLETTE HALL

Sister, generous critic, fellow-worker in my art,
This I give is little, but I give with all my heart.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Head of his Company	1
II.	A Broken Sixpence	12
III.	On Jonkheers Hill	22
IV.	The Hospitality of the Bush	32
V.	Neal adopts a Cousin	43
VI.	The Bridegroom's Pig	55
VII.	Cecil's Shoebuckles	66
VIII.	"The Beaux' Stratagem"	78
IX.	Pinxter	89
X.	To the Wilderness	101
XI.	What Little Prince found	112
XII.	At the Castle Gate	122
XIII.	A String of Pearls	133
XIV.	Under the Pines	144
XV.	The Sachem's Pipe	154
XVI.	Home	163
XVII.	"The Third Time of Asking"	174
XVIII.	Groom's Day	184
XIX.	When the Ice went out	195
XX.	In the Dead Room	204
XXI.	The Pasture's Billet	215
XXII.	La Presentation	226
XXIII.	His Wedded Wife	236
XXIV.	In the Summer Parlor	248
XXV.	Tonsured	258
XXVI.	Face to Face	268
XXVII.	The Battle of Silver Water	278
XXVIII.	The Bloody Pond	287
XXIX.	Neal's Second Chance	299
XXX.	The Heiress of the Pasture	308

THE BLACK GOWN

CHAPTER I

HEAD OF HIS COMPANY

"Where soil is, men grow,
Whether to weeds or flowers."

KEATS.

TINKLE, tinkle, tinkle, down the village street came the sweet, piercing sound of little bells. It was milking-time, and the Albany cows were on their way home from pasture. Against a yellow sunset the broad backs and curving horns showed in silhouette as the cattle tramped heavily along the lane.

Cecil Loveland guided his cousin's gig to the side of the road. He glanced up the grassy by-path. "That little maid will be frightened of the cows," said he.

His sister followed the direction of his eyes. "Oh, provoking man!" she cried, affecting more good-humor than she felt; for twilight was falling, and they were to sup at the manor with the governor. "Much you would care for the child's alarm, were she not a veritable pocket Venus."

"That is it," slapping his thigh with the reins

he held. "You always choose the right word, Mary. A pocket Venus, indeed! Saw you ever such arch coquetry, as the minx skims along her way? And her face, — her face, when she looks back at me over her shoulder! 'T is a miniature Aphrodite, although after Holbein."

Both laughed, while the woman's beauty took on an expression something like scorn as she eyed, more coldly than did the stripling beside her, the exquisite small figure flitting on ahead. Miss Loveland even gave a glance downward at her frock, after her comprehensive stare had gleaned each item of the little girl's costume, — the short gown, striped petticoat, and sturdy slippers. She flung aside her cardinal, as if the evening had grown warm.

Cecil clucked encouragement to his horse, which quickened its slow gait, paying no heed, however, to the approaching herd. There were some five hundred cows, leaderless, bringing themselves home. Each, as she came to her master's house, disengaged herself from the others, and paced sedately into the wide, grassy garden stretching back from the stoop. Here a slave stood, waiting, pail and stool in hand. Here, too, were children in every dooryard, hugging to them pewter porringers of suppawn, which only required their portion of milk to become an evening meal. Some of these watchers nodded and smiled at the other child, or called a warning when the cattle encroached upon her path. Cecil drew rein beside her.

"My dear," he asked in a soft, low voice, — Mary smiled to hear that voice, — "will you not climb into the gig with us until those cows have passed?"

She raised her face, like a delicate blossom, glancing curiously up at him. English was rarely used among the burghers, but with a garrison at the fort on the hill and in the great houses frequent visitors from New York, even this child understood what young Loveland said. Still, she was obliged to answer in Dutch.

"I am not afraid," she protested stoutly. "It is only our cow and the others. And I am in haste. I am late for the party, you see."

As she threw that shy smile upward, Cecil's heart took fire. "Jupiter's thunderbolts!" he muttered. "She is like flowers and honey and wine, Mary. The baby is a piece of perfection."

"And yet a baby," the undertone reminded him. "Don't trifle further. We are late for Madam Van Rensselaer, as it is."

When her brother's reply was a shrug of the shoulders, Mary always folded her hands, and sank back into an attitude of resignation. Cecil fancied this meant surrender. Now he shrugged his shoulders, and she folded her hands in her lap.

"Where is the party, love?" he urged. "Can I not take you on your way?"

In her impatience, Eve Verbeeck would have run on again. But after one sweet, sly glance towards the man's insignificant face and form, her

eyes had wandered to the lovely woman beside him. They fell from the beauty they admired to fasten upon the blue and silver of a brocaded gown. Eve stood motionless, taking in every detail, as she thus imperfectly beheld it, of Mary Loveland's dress. At Cecil's speech she started from her abstraction, looking blank.

It would be flagrant disobedience to accept his offer. The little girls of Albany were taught to distrust and leave severely alone the naughty men who wore that scarlet coat in which the youthful officer was decked. On the other hand, he plainly admired her small self, and — it was much pleasanter to drive than to walk, and — she must see the lady's gown more closely. So Eve climbed into the gig.

Mary made room for the child with her accustomed graciousness. She never wasted a regret on the accomplished fact. They were plastic circumstances which she sought to mould.

"Where is the party?" asked Cecil, starting up his horse. "You must guide me, little dear."

Eve enjoyed such epithets as if she could taste or handle them. The Dutch were chary of betraying their affection in speech. She rewarded Loveland by another smile, while she pointed out the house. "There," said she, "at Nealie Sleight's. He is head of our company, — one of them, I mean."

"One of them?" Cecil repeated. "And I suppose you are another, then?"

She shook her quaint hood carelessly. "No;

the other is Garretje. But Neal is one, and that is just as good. He always does what I say."

Cecil felt a ridiculous anger rise in his breast, and centre upon the obliging Nealie Sleight. Mary saw its signs, as she saw everything. Endeavoring to create a diversion, she pointed out a child they passed, eating his suppawn upon his father's stoop.

"He has not gone to your party," said she.

Eve cast a hasty look in the boy's direction before resuming her survey of the blue and silver gown. "That 's Tony Corson," she remarked. "He 's not in our company."

Brother and sister exchanged an amused smile over the head between them. "Have we social distinctions among these babes in the woods?" said Mary, not at all understanding Eve's allusion. Then, in a higher key, "Do hasten, Cecil. I believe you are holding the horse back purposely."

He made no response, nor did he alter their pace. Slowly though they moved, Neal Sleight's home was near.

"And what is your name?" he inquired.

"Eve. I am the Widow Verbeeck's daughter." Between her tiny fingers she was pinching the brocade. "For Bride's Sunday," she announced, "I shall have a gown like this."

"Where do you live, Eve Verbeeck?"

"On Jonkheers Street, three doors below St. Peter's church;" she jerked her thumb over her shoulder. "And it shall be made after the same pattern."

"How old" —

"Oh, Cecil, why bother the child?" Mary was showing the silver lace that edged the bodice. "Leave her to her happiness."

Nor was Miss Loveland without some petty gratification in the display. The house of the party came inopportunely for her, as well, though the governor's tea was waiting at the manor.

To Eve it was a change of delight. "Oh, here we are!" she cried. "And they are playing. Listen to that noise. Please let me out! Please let me out! And thank you very much."

In her haste, she never noticed Cecil. Mary caught the last longing inspection of her gown. Then, brushing past the young soldier, ignoring his assistance, Eve flew to the ground and up the path. She floated through the air like thistledown. "Good-by," she called gayly. "Good-by. I hope I am not too late for supper."

"That is beyond hoping for us," said Mary, and gave a light laugh at the expression her brother wore.

A large, benignant negress opened the door for Eve, receiving her with the air of hostess, while humbly taking her wraps. "Hurry into the dining-room, missy," she advised. "Ah, but Master Neal has been in a way about you. Hurry, now that you are come."

"Have you had supper?" Eve inquired, untying her hood.

"Not yet. We have oley-koeks on purpose for you, and jellied cranberries. Are you ready?"

She threw the dining-room door wide open, and the little girl darted in. No one formally greeted her. At such meetings parents were expected to leave the house, and the slave in the hall stood in the position of mistress of ceremonies. As for Cornelis, or the other children, glad as they were to be joined by this companion, to tell her so, by word or gesture, would have seemed affected.

A little fellow, — this was his seventh birthday, — who yet overtopped the older boys and girls by a head, turned his dark face and soft, hazel eyes at the creaking of the door. He was standing in the centre of a ring of dancing figures. On Eve's entrance he had touched one small maid with the ribbon-decked rod he held. Smirking and becking, Albertse disengaged herself from the others, for notice from Neal was a royal favor. Her steps were arrested by his commanding voice.

"No, no. Go back, please. I choose Eve Verbeeck now."

Eve ran forward, nothing loath, but the forsaken damsel held her ground.

"It is n't fair," she protested dolefully, appealing to her mates. "Is it fair? Nealie had touched me, here on my cheek, with his rod. I want to go in the ring."

Neal threw his weight from one foot to the other. Eve waited, without the circle, gazing steadily at him.

"No, it was n't fair. It was n't."

"I never knew any one to change before."

From the torrent of objection one voice, that of

the oldest boy, delivered its dictum judicially: "It 's too late to change after the rod has touched," said he.

Eve's eyes did not relax their hold on Neal's. His fell beneath them, but it was in perplexity.

"Nealie is head," her mild tone suggested.

A company's head was absolute monarch, as the others ruefully remembered. It was Neal who threw back his hair with a gay laugh. He would not rule in that way.

"Well, I am in a fix!" he announced cheerily. "Albertse, won't you please give up?"

She flounced her skirts impatiently. "Indeed, no."

"Why don't you ask Eve?" was Garretje Lansing's tart contribution to the dispute. "Why should it be poor Albertse, and never Eve?"

They all stood in silence, pondering this query, till Neal shook the black waves of his hair again. "But I don't want Eve to give up," he urged. "And Albertse knows I only chose her because Eve had n't come."

In the depths of Albertse's sore little heart there was born a conviction that, no matter how kindly and gracious, — and Neal had such pretty ways! — the masculine mind would irresistibly work its will. Teunis Schemerhorn, her mate in the company, was glaring at their host, but Albertse paid no heed to him. Eve and she looked, the one in protest, the one in assurance, at Neal.

Presently the boy sprang forward. Seizing Albertse by both hands, he kissed her pouting lips. Then he whispered something in her ear.

"Well, I will," she said. "I give up."

After that the game went on.

The next interruption was Maria's appearance with a tray of food. "Choose partners," she called, "and take your places. Master Neal, lead little missy to the head of the room."

She spoke in the sharp tones of brief authority, indicating two armchairs which commanded a row of seats along the wall. Maria assumed that Cornelis would give the place of honor to Eve. In the same confidence the boy extended his hand. Eve's eyes sparkled angrily, and she did not move. That whisper to Albertse buzzed its mystery about her ears. She wished to resent it. And yet, to be first, first selected, first served from the salver, to be seated in the high-backed chair, — revenge was sweet, but not so sweet as this. She took Neal's hand.

When he was munching nuts and cakes with the gusto of hunger, and the little girl sipped her syllabub and nibbled at Diana's famous sweets, she abruptly raised her face to his.

"What is it?" cooed Neal solicitously; for the features wore a piteous expression.

"Stoop down. I want to ask you something."

His olive cheek leaned till it almost touched the pink and pearl of hers.

"What did you say to Albertse?"

Neal sat up straight. "I can't tell you."

"Not me? You could tell me. Please, oh, please, Nealie."

He handed her a porcelain cup. "I said we

must have chocolate. And there are oley-koeks on purpose for little missy. Take this, dear. You like chocolate, don't you, Eve?"

"Please, Nealie."

"And here come the cranberries and preserved pears. I think Maria has cider, too."

"Please, Nealie."

The boy gave her the dried plums from his plate. "You may have my share," he whispered.

"Please, Nealie. Just to me."

"Oh, Eve, I can't. It would be so horrid mean."

Eve half rose from her seat. "I wonder if Cæsar has come for me," she icily remarked. "It must be time to go home."

"Not yet; not for a long time yet."

"I want to see mother," the cold, clear voice went on; "I must tell her that I disobeyed to-day. A soldier, a fine gentleman, with a lady all in blue and silver, he brought me here in his gig."

Neal gasped at the magnitude of her daring. "Did you say he was with his wife?" he faltered.

Eve bent her head, glancing up from beneath her lashes. "I fancy, from the way he talked to me, he was not wed," she answered.

Neal flung himself about in his chair. "Was it a handsome officer?"

Eve hesitated. She did not like to tell lies. She knew where she should go — Dominie Freylinghausen had said it — if she lied. But perdition was far away, and she must hear what Neal had told Albertse.

"Yes," she declared. "Very handsome indeed."

Neal drew a deep sigh. Leaning over the arm of his chair he murmured: "I suppose I shall have to tell — just to you. What I said to Albertse was: 'I like you next to Eve. I always have. But truly I love Eve best. Be a good girl, and help me.' And so she was a good girl, and she did help me by giving up."

CHAPTER II

A BROKEN SIXPENCE

"All women are perfection, especially she who loves you."
TURKISH PROVERB.

"ARE we all here?" asked Neal.

He ran his eyes over the little party, counting it by twos.

"Eve is here. I suppose that is enough, and we might as well start," said Albertse. She often puzzled the young fellow of late by such sharp speeches. They puzzled herself no less. Why should she show Neal the contrariety of her temper? She had always liked him, and had been good natured with every one till now. Eve did not share this surprise. She understood.

Neal gave the girl one of his disarming smiles. "Ah, Teunis is missing," he cried. "I see. How stupid of me, for of course we can't go till Teunis comes."

The other boys were piling guns, axes, and fishing-rods into their canoes. The hour of meeting was sunrise, and the eastern sky was like one superb pink rose. All were impatient to be away. No one, besides Albertse and Neal, felt disposed to await the laggard.

Jasper Douw, always officious, bustled up to them. "Did Teunis tell you he might be late?"

"Yes, Albertse," chorused the others. "That is the question. Did he say we were to wait?"

Reluctantly she confessed: "No. He told me we must not. His father may need him to-day, and, if he were not here by starting-time, we should know he would follow afterwards; for dinner, any way."

Eve stooped to tie her shoe; partly that, and partly to hide the sneer which curved her lips. Poor, dull Albertse, who wanted to leave Teunis behind, who wanted Neal to take her to the island in his canoe, and yet had no notion what she wanted. Eve always knew.

"Will you come with us, then?" Cornelis asked in his pretty civility. Any one else would have said, "You may come," but Neal never took that attitude even to himself. He did not look to Eve for permission to share their boat, and she understood him too well to resent the slight. In such a case Neal would be master.

However, throughout the miles between Albany and the island where they were to picnic, Eve found her opportunity to show the intruder tucked clumsily into the bow that she was, in every sense, in the way. Neal saw nothing of this. He thought vaguely the lady of his love was more than usually exacting in her demands upon his attention. He never guessed she was exhibiting his devotion for Albertse's conviction and discomfiture.

On reaching land the girls climbed ashore from the tottlish boat, and securing their workboxes,

gay Indian baskets, and rolls of knitting, strolled leisurely up the bank. Meanwhile Pedrom Tyssen and Neal, with their axes, had felled a few saplings and cleared a space, weaving the branches into a bower of retreat from the coming noonday. It was still early. Jasper made a great fire, starting it into a blaze with flint and powder; Lubert and Dirk Janssen were fishing off the point. By breakfast-time the girls had spread a tablecloth on a flat rock, fish were cleaned and fried, the kettle boiled, and every one was ready for the meal.

More fishing followed, or duck-shooting, on the part of the youths, while the half-dozen girls of Neal's company gathered around the dying embers to pass their morning in that handicraft which, with Dutch housewives, encroached upon most hours of pleasure. There was none of the chatter common to Virginian maids, or even the Massachusetts Puritans. New Netherland had not outgrown its gravity in the transition to New York. Albany women, although to a degree infected by the gayeties of a garrison town, were sober beyond their years, while a lack of culture betrayed itself among certain classes. None of these friends could read, further than to stumble through a chapter in the Bible. None of them could write.

Yet some conversation there must be when a group of girls draws together.

"I suppose you and Neal will be the next to marry," Garretje observed to Eve. They had been questioning Albertse concerning her brother's wedding. Tony belonged to another company, so that they knew little about his plans.

Without taking her attention from the stocking she was toeing off, Eve saw every envious glance in her direction. She longed to answer an unqualified assent. The fact was that their head had not asked her to be his wife. "Neal is only seventeen," said she, "and I am a year younger. I don't want to marry yet."

"Many couples wed at your age and his," insisted Catalina, "though of course you must wait till Neal shall go on his trading-trip. But he has not given you your buckles, I see."

She stared, all the girls staring, too, at the little shoes crossed on a log for a footstool. Eve's color rose. She was truthful in what she asserted. Without despising Neal's poverty, — no Dutchman was despised for being poor, — she would prefer to wait till he might amass a fortune, according to provincial notions, by the business schemes with which her head was crowded. Forgetting these resolves in that moment of shame, Eve determined she should wear Neal's silver buckles before the week was out. She leaned forward with an air of candor. "I will tell you one thing, girls," said she: "I came to the conclusion long ago, — I shall not marry till I have a blue and silver brocade for my gown on Bride's Sunday."

"Like young Vrouw Schuyler's?" inquired Anna Janssen.

"Yes."

"Oh, Eve! how can you? One must be very rich to wear a frock like that."

"I know it," Eve calmly replied. "I mean to be very rich."

"Before we have made Eve's wedding-gown," exclaimed Albertse, starting up, "the boys will come back to dinner. There is Teunis, and I fancied I heard Neal's voice a moment ago."

Eve was not to be put down by Albertse Corson. "We always have time to prepare dinner," she retorted, "while the birds are dressed and cooking. Nor because Albertse heard Neal's voice, does that imply he is near at hand."

As it happened, he was near. At that instant fishermen, hunters, and the latest comer all appeared on the brow of the bank together.

While they ate their substantial luncheon of cold pastry and fried duck, of broiled fish and corncakes, followed by mild rum punch, Eve sat in abstraction, unheeding the boys' wild jokes and the girls' prim replies. Her mind was building upon its resolution. Marriage to her meant wealth, and wealth meant beautiful clothes. She had jeered in her secret soul at the modest preparations of those of her acquaintance who, while still children, entered into wedlock. There could be no finery for the Widow Verbeeck's daughter, nor the wife of Cornelis Sleight, save after years of waiting and of successful trade. Neither did she wish to bind herself. She had never, in fancy, given name and place to the form whereby riches might come to her. Here was the awakening: whom could she or should she marry, but Neal?

To go outside one's company was rated almost as a crime. She looked around her on the young men of whom Neal was head. Any one she might

lure away from any other girl. So she believed in her beauty, and was convinced. Where was the advantage? One's father owned more land, and one more cattle, than Pieter Sleight could give his son. On the other hand, — she scrutinized them, as if for the first time. Awkward, clownish, they appeared to her sensitive criticism. Neal towered above them, not alone by virtue of his magnificent length and breadth of stature, but with the dark splendor of his face, his eyes and hair and mouth, tender as a child's and offset with the sternness of his chin. When he caught her gaze fastened thus upon him, he smiled. For the second in which she answered his smile, Eve Verbeeck was always sweet and good. Yes, she should marry Neal; now, or at any time in the nearest present when he saw fit to say.

After dinner the party scattered through the woods laden with their baskets, in search of blackberries. They met again for tea-drinking in their bower. Then it was time to start for home.

The sun had set. A trembling star shone down on them as Neal helped Eve to her place in the canoe. "It is our star," said he.

Often they had looked on it together, in the long evenings of long years spent in merrymakings like these. He pushed off the boat, springing easily to his seat and gathering up the paddle. Eve watched him passionately. Beauty of any material sort (as yet she recognized no other) appealed with insistence to her. She liked to follow his movements as he propelled the boat. She

liked his grace and his strength. She liked to remember that he was called the handsomest man at the Fuyck.

"We have been talking, we girls, of Dirkse's marriage and Tony's," she broke the silence to say.

"Yes?"

"Albertse declares her father is glad Tony should make his choice so young. He thinks it a good thing for a boy."

Neal looked at her with a gentle light in his eyes. "Is it a good thing for a girl? That is of more importance. Our housewives work so hard. It makes me angry, sometimes, to see how hard they work."

Eve's head drooped. "You always think of others first. Perhaps the girl would be thankful to work for you."

"Do you mean that?" He spoke fast. His paddle hung suspended over the side. The canoe must have swung from its course had not Eve pulled the rudder-string.

"Yes, I mean it," she answered.

Neal reached out his left hand to her.

"Be careful," she whispered. "You will upset the boat."

"Careful!" He drew her to him, gathering her little body up into his arms.

As she felt the beating of his heart, the quick throb of his breath, she thought: "How strong he is! How his eyes shine! There is no one — no one in the world like Neal."

"Eve, you are willing to come to our poor house, to care for my father and me?" his hoarse voice murmured to her, while her cheek lay softly against his.

"Yes, Neal."

She wished he would notice, for himself, that the boat was veering about. The current was swift here. They two were the last to set out from shore, as Eve had managed. A mishap might come to pass, and no one at hand to help. She did not like to warn him again. It seemed flippant then, when Neal lifted her chin in his palm that her lips might meet his own. And, after all, no youth can be absolutely sordid and mean. At Neal's kiss Eve's heart beat high. She would do all things for this man. She would give up her dreams. She folded and laid away in her mind the blue and silver brocade.

They said very little, if first love is ever talkative. For the lad his second of bliss was cruelly cut short by the antics of the canoe. "Once more let me kiss you," he breathed. "And then — we must get home some way, you know."

They both laughed. She clung to him prettily, but she did not resent his seating her in the bow of the boat again. Neal knew how to swim, of course, and would save her, did the worst come, yet a wetting was not the more to be desired. And she could view him, from the nest he had made for her there, with keener sight as she reflected, despite Albertse's overtures, despite Catalina's jibes, the power and the comeliness, and the

dear, sweet temper of this man were hers henceforth as truly as they were his.

The others had landed and were waiting for them, by the time they reached the town. There was no further opportunity for a word apart until they stood on the widow's stoop. Two by two the boys and girls had gone, here and there, to their homes. They were alone for a little, in the shade of the porch. Neal set the baskets of berries and the wraps down on one of the benches. He turned in his deliberate, purposeful way. He held out his arms.

"Have you a flower on your gown?" he asked. "The scent of jasmine has meant you to me ever since — I put out my hand, in the boat."

She broke the spray at her neck into equal bits. Kissing one, she held it up to him, — "To keep."

"Yes, love, to keep."

He took it in one hand, while with the other he pulled a coin from his pocket. Eve's eyes dilated and darkened as she saw him bend the sixpence till it broke in the pressure of his fingers. He gave the half to her, — "And this to keep."

"Yes, dear."

Their farewell was long and fond. She left him and went into the silent house, groping her way in the dark to bed. The flower and the broken sixpence she laid on her candlestand. "But I hope he won't forget," was her last waking thought, "that I must have my buckles, too."

The vision that danced before Eve's eyes, as they closed, was not of Neal Sleight's dark face,

framed in its waving hair. She saw Catalina and Garretje and Albertse, and they stared at her silver buckles. It is fearful to consider how, for reasons light as hers, men and women commit themselves to the tremendous obligations of a lifetime. Neal came, with his betrothal gift, on the morrow. Of course he would. At the last moonlight frolic of that autumn, before winter cold set in, his sweetheart's slippers were duly admired as they tripped through the country dance.

Albertse's fate was sealed.

CHAPTER III

ON JONKHEERS HILL

"Parsimony of pain, glut of pleasure, these are the two alternating ends of youth." — R. L. Stevenson.

The night was still and cold. The air seemed like a wine that stings the palate, and yet is sweet to it. The river had closed early that year. On its glistening surface skaters and sledges darted to and fro. Jonkheers Street, the road that ran from the fort to the gardens along the water, was a glare of ice. It had tempted out every boy in Albany, — and all unmarried men were boys, — with sweetheart and sled, to take part in the pastime of the province.

Up the hill stretched the line of slowly climbing couples along one side of the street. Down the hill they flew, sled succeeding sled, as the flight of frightened birds, flashing over the snow. The crisp night resounded with exultant shouts and cries of warning, with the peculiar swish of the passing sled, the cheery hail of its owner. Occasionally came a mishap, collision, or reckless steering. Then man and maid were dashed headlong into the drifts at the roadside and, screaming expostulations, scrambled to their feet.

"What, pray, Maasen, do you call this employment?"

Though he needed it for support on the slippery walk, the speaker waved his stick towards the lively scene. He wore the uniform of the regulars. His companion was foppishly attired after the latest London mode. He stuck a glass into his eye to gaze deprecatingly upon the whizzing sleds: "'T is our local sport," said he. "I had clear forgot, in my long absence, how the winter nights were passed."

His mouth assumed the mocking smile of the soldier. His eyes remained fixed on the revelers. "Ay, sledging on Jonkheers Hill is part of a season at the Fuyck," his meditative voice went on.

The other was about to make further comment. Suddenly his parted lips closed; his face grew intent and sober. He stared attentively at an approaching couple. Up the walk on which they stood a long line of boys and girls was ascending the quarter mile to the summit. They were silent, for so young a company, because they required every breath for the perilous climb. Opposite the two men in the throng there had come one pair upon whom Maasen thought, noticing his friend's abstraction, it were small marvel attention should rest. "I see you have discovered our Beverwyck beauties," he remarked.

The young man pulled lightly with one hand on the taut rope of his sled. With his other arm he supported a slight, small figure muffled in furs and hood, yet so graceful, so sweet of rosy cheeks and dancing eyes and wind-blown love-locks, that she passed, the embodiment of gay happiness.

"A Hebe," Maasen suggested, after the mythologic comparisons of the age.

Her companion was even more remarkable. While the girl was lovely, he was splendid in his rough winter dress. He stood over six feet high, broad in his shoulders and finely proportioned of limb. He carried himself like an Indian, his admirers said, as the highest praise they could give. Despite the dirt in which they lived, — and the earliest colonists found them in it, — the unspoiled natives were physically ideal. When Benjamin West first saw the Apollo Belvedere, he cried: "How like a young Mohawk warrior!"

Cornelis Sleight resembled a savage in his figure, his carriage, his dark eyes and hair. But his cheek was olive that, no matter what the exposure, would never roughen nor tan, and his long hair tossed, in heavy waves, in his neck. He ignored his good looks yet, in every position, he was as near perfect as if appearance were the sole consideration of his mind.

The young officer looked first and last at Eve. Between those glances he had seen Neal, and he hated him. He felt, for he was a thoroughgoing egotist, that every eye in that concourse was measuring and comparing this magnificent countryman with his own puny form, his ladylike features and proportions.

The two went on, Eve smiling up into Neal's face, he smiling down at her. Neither spoke, but then they never had talked much together.

"Who is she?" asked Cecil Loveland.

"Eve Verbeeck. Her mother is a widow living — there."

Maasen pointed towards the house. They stood close to its stoop, where a clumsily wrapped woman was observing the fun. He had decorously lowered his tone, in the presence of Eve's mother. In the same low voice he went on: "She is startlingly pretty, is she not? There is no mistaking that face, although I have not seen it for five years."

"Nor I for ten," said Cecil, in impulsive confidence. "Yet I recognized the child at once."

Maasen showed his astonishment. "So you are old friends? And do you know Neal Sleight as well?"

"Oh, and that is Nealie Sleight?" Cecil looked after the wide shoulders thrown out against the white background of Jonkheers Hill. "Yes, after a fashion, Eve and I are old friends. I am inclined to renew our acquaintance."

Unceremoniously he left his companion, and hastened along the slope. The two in advance were so accustomed to that dangerous incline, they walked so easily, so fast, that, pant and hurry as he might, he could not overtake them before they reached the top. Nor did he notice that Maasen followed close behind him.

"Mejuffrouw, am I forgotten?"

Cecil employed his best Dutch. He stepped eagerly forward, — too eagerly, for he ignored the slant of ice. His feet tripped, his body tottered. Neal had paused with Eve, at the call of the thin,

high voice. The great fellow threw out one arm and caught Cecil round his waist.

"Careful, mynheer!" he cautioned, "we stand on slippery places here;" and set him upright again.

Under such disadvantage did Loveland recall himself to Eve Verbeeck's mind.

But the glory of his scarlet coat went far to do away with the remembrance of his awkwardness, even with the sight of his little figure beside Neal's majesty. Eve fancied his dress, secretly, for she dared not confess it to a soul. Moreover, at sight of him, a swift, sweet memory arose. "I remember you," said she, stretching out her hand; "and your sister, as well. How kind you both were to me that day!"

Cecil told her his name, and she brought Neal forward. She wished, fretfully, that he would take part in the conversation they kept afloat. Why need he stand silent, sulky even, while the Englishman and she exchanged merry compliments?

"Come, Eve," Neal finally broke in; "you will catch cold here. We must go back to the sleighing."

"I am quite warm."

"You will catch cold, standing still. Come."

She hesitated. Her gaze wandered from his grave face to Cecil's. She saw a lurking sneer about the soldier's mouth. And her lover was very rude. "I am tired," she declared. "I don't think I shall coast any more to-night."

"It is not nine o'clock."

"Neal, I say I am tired."

"Very well. Good-night, mynheer." He drew Eve's fingers through his arm. "The juffrouw is going home."

A woman has always her armament of petty revenges prepared for every emergency. Eve never so admired her lover as when he acted the master. Still she was angry with him, too. She held out her bare left hand to Cecil, standing in the snow and surveying her submission with a smile. "If you would come to see my mother," she said, "she will thank you, sir, for your goodness, long ago, to her little girl."

She spoke in English, a recent accomplishment, which Neal shared but could not be persuaded to use. She was aware, without a glance in his direction, that he resented her language no less than its meaning.

"I shall come," Cecil answered in a tender voice. "I know where you live. I have not forgotten."

That last sentence rang in her ears, as he intended it should.

Neither spoke, while Neal helped her down the hill. From the many sleds that spun by them there were calls and remonstrances.

"Why do you go so early?" cried Pedrom and Teunis.

Albertse, who was with young Schemerhorn, did not ask the question. "Perhaps they have quarreled," she suggested, and smiled when her attendant urged that their manner was quite as usual. Sometimes the woman marvels at her own sagacity; sometimes at a man's blindness.

A breathless shout at last arrested Neal. "May I borrow your sled?" it asked. He paused till Maasen, running after him, reached his side. "'T is but for one trial," explained the exquisite. "I — it is so inspiriting. I should like one trial, for the sake of old times, you know."

Neal bowed. He was in no mood for speech, although he handed over his sled. A little later, Cecil, looking about him for the friend he had abandoned, was startled by a salute from the middle of the street. He stared out into the medley of faces and scarves and sleds, all moving like the bits in a kaleidoscope. Among the sturdy burgher lads and lasses he spied one alien. The richly clad London fop, his eyeglass twirling on its string, his cocked hat tugged down to his ears, was speeding past the soldier, guiding by its rope his tricky vehicle, feet stiffly stuck out before him, gaze intent on the course he steered.

"Savages, all of them," Cecil commented, cold and lonely in the snow. "The veneer is but skin deep. No sooner does one return to the wilderness than the coat of civilization peels off and drops away. And I — I might as well go home to my Annetje, I suppose." He gave a little rueful laugh, feeling much misused by Maasen and Eve, and, preëminently, by Neal. He resented the dangers of his path; he resented the winter weather. As he passed the Widow Verbeeck's house, he stole a sidelong glance at its front for sign of the lovers.

There was no such sign. Neal had parted from the girl as never before, with a curt good-night.

This was the utmost propriety allowed at the doorway, with a street full of lookers-on and Neal's father lingering near to enjoy the sport as a spectacle, keeping up a desultory talk with the widow. Eve was perfectly aware, however, that, had not Neal been deeply offended, he would have come indoors, away from those witnesses to their farewell, away from the crude jests of old Pieter Sleight as to the deprivations of their approaching marriage. For they were only the spinsters and bachelors who, by Albany etiquette, could join a coasting party.

She went so far as to say timidly: "You are not going home thus early?" But unfortunately, from sheer nervousness, she spoke in English. Neal, his bruised heart going out to her, shook his head in silence at what he deemed an additional affront, and went away. He was relieved that his father did not offer to join him. He wished to be alone.

He plunged down, when the Dutch church was reached, through a garden that ran to the river. Here he pulled his skates from his deep pocket, adjusted them, and, in another moment, was flying towards the north. All too soon his father's house came into sight. He wanted time to think, to excuse Eve to himself. He wanted the exhilaration of that brilliant exercise, the glow and zest which, for the time, blew his black thoughts into the wind behind him. But while he was plodding through the drifts to the door, it all came back. How could she wound a man whom she pretended to

love? How could she have eyes, and such mischievous, provoking eyes, for any save himself? He never looked at other girls. He could not tell, if Eve asked him, what they wore, or said, or did. She was all the world to him.

Beginning literally as babies to care and be set apart for each other, Neal had grown to manhood without encountering opposition to his love. As head of his company, he stood supreme in one of those arbitrarily chosen circles wherein the society of old Albany was peculiar. By reason of its exclusions, no less than from his beauty and attraction of temper and manner, he met to-night the first rival of his life. Always hitherto he had been so easily superior that there was no comparison. And it was a regular, in the odious red uniform, an Englishman, a shrimp of a fellow (his lip curled as he recalled Cecil Loveland's appearance), who dared to try his attractions upon Eve, — and who succeeded.

Maria opened the door. Neal's mother died at his birth. The big black woman had brought him up with her own boy. "What is the matter, Master Neal?" she asked at the first sight of him.

He scowled irritably. Neal was no talker, and moreover he felt shame at the notion of whining to a woman.

"Tell me!" said Maria authoritatively.

He tried to pass her in the narrow hall, to reach the table where his candle stood. Her portly person blocked the way.

"It is nothing, nothing whatever." His words

were cross, but his tone was gentle. Maria was not to be put off.

"Has old master been spiting my pretty boy?"

"You know he never does. No; won't you believe what I say? Let me go by, Maria, to bed."

"It 's the juffrouw!" the negress broke out, after another inspection of Neal's features by the taper she held. "What has she done to my darling? I 'll pay her well for this." Her expression changed to that of a fury. Husband and son were not so dear to the slave as this white boy she had nursed.

Neal threw his arm over her shoulder. "She has done nothing, really, either," he insisted. "Only I was a fool and jealous, mammy. Think of it; for the first time, I was jealous, to-night, of another man."

Maria asked no further questions. He wondered afterwards at this. She gave him his candle and saw him mount the narrow stairs, without comment on the rare confidence he had vouchsafed. But upon being left alone, her ugly features twitched with weeping. She sobbed, and, going over to where his coat hung, kissed it in an abandon of grief.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOSPITALITY OF THE BUSH

"To be young is surely the best, if the most precarious gift of life."
J. R. Lowell.

It went without saying that matters looked less grave to Neal after he had set a few hours of sleep between himself and them. A sleighing party for his company was planned to take place on the following evening. This brought him, driving his father's horse, to the widow's door at sunset. The sound of bells called Eve to the stoop. "I shall be ready in a moment," she cried cheerily, and Neal thanked fate, as many a time before, that the girl was so sweet-tempered.

She came quickly, well wrapped against the still cold of the night, a footstove in one hand, a basket in the other. He left the horse alone while he lifted her and her belongings into the sledge. Thus far he had not spoken, but Eve was accustomed to his silences. It sufficed that he was here. He tucked her among the buffalo robes, and the little stove he set at her feet. Then, before he took his place, he glanced bashfully all about him. There was no one to see. He stooped his head. His cold lips brushed her hand. That was all. They were back again on the old footing.

Neal drove down to the river where, amid a crowd of noisy skaters, he found the others waiting. "Which way do we go?" he called.

Jasper Douw was always eager with a plan, if Neal appeared undecided. "Let us try the east," he counseled. "We went north the last time. And I know where to find a house I've always wanted to get inside."

There was a derisive shout at this, Jasper's curiosity being proverbial.

Neal surrendered the lead to him. "We will follow," he promised. "Show us the place you mean."

They drove on and on, farther than they usually went in these frequent expeditions, although that was partly Jasper's fault, in conducting them along several unfamiliar ways. The sky shone full of stars when the line of sledges stopped at bars they must let down.

"It's Barent Kierstiede's house," young Douw explained, as he resumed his seat. "The main building is in sight from this point. Isn't it a fine old place?"

All gazed after his pointing whip. Neither Neal nor Eve had ever been here before. Country dwellers were always delighted with the visits even of strangers. No one dreamed of demurring because they did not know their host. They drove through the field, then into a grove of oak-trees, and so close to the substantial, broad brick house.

The main portion was two stories in height, with a basement. All this, as was to be expected, was

closed and dark. It contained the summer rooms. Yet Neal's swift survey was sure it caught, between the chinks of one heavy shutter, a streak of light from within. He looked again, and it was there. Then, as if their sleigh-bells were a signal, the streak of light went out.

They drove around the house. A long, low wing ran at a right angle from the back. This was aglow with lights, for here the family lived in the colder weather. Neal sprang across the broad porch, lifted the knocker, and gave a jolly tap.

Cecil Loveland opened the door.

The two men stared blankly at each other before the older and more experienced recovered himself. Where Neal Sleight appeared, Eve was probably to be found. He held out both hands in greeting. "This is a charming surprise," he exclaimed. "I am enraptured to see you, mynheer;" and Neal perceived that he was peering past his figure, out into the starlight, where the sledges stood.

"Yes, it is a surprise," he answered, and cursed Jasper's inquisitive vein. "May we make free with your house?"

"Not mine." Cecil stepped out of doors. He was still searching for Eve. "Yet, perhaps, in my cousin's illness, I may play the part of host. You are heartily welcome here."

They were aware of that, wherever they might go; still the Dutch reserve had never put it into a set phrase. Cecil dashed, bareheaded, down the steps to assist Eve from the sledge, Neal watching his movements. He heard the door behind him

open once more. It led, by a storm porch, into the dining and living room. From inside this narrow inclosure a young girl surveyed him. She shielded a candle in one hand, by which Neal and she exchanged a long and earnest look.

She saw a man so fine, so intensely powerful and insistent, in his personality that he affected her like a blow; no, not a blow, she thought; it was more a caress. He saw a slim, tall figure dressed after the English fashion, yet attractive, even so, to him. He saw masses of rich brown hair arranged in pompadour and tower, and he only mused: "I must coax Eve to wear her curls that way." He saw a clear-cut face, lighted by deep gray eyes that gave another touch of dignity and distinction, of courage and truth, to what otherwise might be proud and high. Neal bowed to her as he had never hitherto saluted a woman. "Do we intrude, madam?"

He spoke in English, but without realizing it.

"You come as a Godsend," she said. He had not known eyes could smile like that while the lips remained serene. "We are a dull household, striving to amuse some unexpected guests. Perhaps you will help us out."

Thereupon she moved forward with her candle, spoke to the others, and so, in a disorderly group, she and Cecil conducted them into the house. The room they entered ran the width of the wing. It was lighted at either end by deep-seated windows, which, this evening, reflected the glow from the chimney and the candelabra upon the long table.

Here sat a little, wrinkled, queer old lady, with eyes like beads under a cap that made Neal think of a crown, and with a cane across her lap which might have been a sceptre, he added to himself. It was not until they were driving home, hours afterward, and Eve and he, as usual, were quiet, that the young man began to reflect how many impressions had flashed, that night, upon him. Never before had he used his mind so constantly.

Neal chanced to lead the visitors. Mary Loveland, also seated by the candles on the table, saw him first, — and, after that, only him, — coming in out of the dark. Neal was amused when, despite Cecil's assumption of the rôle of host, the tall girl, at her appearance, immediately took that position. Without self-assertion she placed herself at the head. "Lady Anne," — she conducted Neal and Eve, the rest following them, to the high carved chair like a throne, — "are you not pleased? These good friends have driven out from the Fuyck to enliven us." She learned their names, and repeated them in a louder key. "I am Annetje Kierstiede," she continued.

The old lady's expression brightened at sight of Neal. Eve's prettiness had no effect upon her. Afterwards Annetje brought forward the younger woman. "Miss Loveland," she began, and went through the list of names once more.

Eve recognized Cecil's sister. "I feel defrauded," she murmured, dropping her dancing-school curtsy, "not to see the blue and silver brocade."

Mary had forgotten the gown, although she smiled, in her non-committal fashion, upon Cornelis's companion. The newcomers were not altogether at their ease, except Eve, who chattered fast to Mary Loveland, her brother hanging about, and Neal, who was amazed to find how readily he conversed with the old lady, the juffrouw adding a comment now and then. She and Lady Anne soon proposed dancing. The great room was cleared, the heavy tulip-wood furniture pushed against the wall. My lady sat on the hearth, in her armchair, and criticised their preparations.

One of the slaves was called in to play, and brought a fiddle of home manufacture. The young people fell to selecting their partners. Eve crossed to where Neal stood, which happened to be by Mary Loveland. Or was it that she had come to stand by him?

"Should you be vexed?" his sweetheart whispered, while Neal bent to hear, "if I danced first with Lieutenant Loveland? He has asked me."

She looked so little and childlike and pretty that he could not frown on her. He set his lips tight together, remembering the good resolutions with which he had wakened that morning. "As you please, love," he replied. "My turn can come next. I will wait."

"That is my good Neal. You see he knows no one else, and — and we are so sure of each other, you and I."

"Yes, we are so sure."

She flung her sweet smile towards him, but it

could not hide the folly of her claim to acquaintance with Cecil Loveland. He wished she had not excused herself. "I suppose I should invite the lady of the house," he considered, looking about for Annetje.

Before he could reach her side, Mary was ahead of him. He caught her clear undertone: "I am sure I heard Cousin Barent rap just now. Can it be possible he is alone?"

Annetje murmured a hasty apology to the shy girl with whom she was talking. She opened a door in the corner and hurriedly left the room. Again Neal found Mary Loveland at his elbow. She appeared gently distressed. "Our host is tormented by rheumatism," she explained in Dutch. "He has been confined to his bedchamber for the past week; indeed, since before I came."

Accordingly Neal requested the honor of this lady's hand for the dance. As he led her to her place he inquired: "You are here for long, mejuffrouw?" The term of address seemed almost impertinent, to his provincial notions, Mary Loveland was so old a woman. She must be nearly thirty, albeit more than beautiful, and without the loss of any charm.

She could not suspect how heavily her answer fell upon his spirit. "For a long time, I fancy. There are business interests to occupy my brother, — he is heir to the great Loveland patent, — even if his regiment were not stationed at the fort. Are you frightened in Beverwyck by these Indian outbreaks?"

Neal replied at random. A foe more to be dreaded than the savages of the north was nearer and harder to fight. He repeated, "We are so sure of each other," over in his mind. By degrees he became absorbed in the dance. Not only were the young Dutchmen of Albany called boys till they took to themselves wives, but they were boys with impetuous manners, full of ardor, and ready to seize upon distraction. Neal acquired every art easily and well. The dancing-lessons taught him by a Huguenot refugee had given delight to his older years. He and Eve were a pleasing picture as they came together in the country dance, and Mary Loveland questioned if he could be so unconscious as he appeared of the admiring glances which followed them when she and Cornelis went down the middle. Annetje quietly entered the room after the dance broke up. Neal led his partner towards her. "I hope we do not disturb your father?" he remarked.

"Oh, no," she said. "The music and the fun are a pleasure, even if he cannot see you; so he assured me. And my old nurse is with him. It was not his rap you heard." This last sentence was to Mary, with a look full into her eyes. It was met and returned. Miss Loveland raised her delicate brows.

"That is strange," she retorted. "Still, there are strange noises in this old house, Annetje."

Annetje grew white as she listened to what was apparently a taunt. By a palpable physical effort she recovered her serenity. Neal felt so embar-

rassed that he left the cousins together, with an evident secret between them, and went away to find Eve Verbeeck. They danced, this time, with each other, and then he once more — for Eve, too, considered it his duty — sought Annetje Kierstiede. She and Mary were busy now in the long hall that led to the main building, laying the tables for supper. Neither of them could be spared, they insisted, though several slaves were present.

Eve whispered to Neal, on seating herself at the laden board, that she was ashamed of the contributions their baskets made to the feast. They had brought roeliche and headcheese, the unfailing supply of liquor, besides doughnuts and seed-cakes. Barent Kierstiede's larder supplied the roasted game and huge hams, skillfully wrought confections, cider, and cinnamon and burnt wine. The table glittered with silver, glass, and many candles. For herself Annetje thought this too fine a display before their simple guests, and doubted its tactfulness. On the other hand, Mary contended, as they set forth the meal, that the elegance did honor to those for whom it was prepared, although she but partially understood her own reasons for urging such lavishness. Did she desire to dazzle that calm young savage who so persistently looked to the pretty Dutch girl from her, Mary Loveland, or lovely Mary, as the toast of years ago had run; who so persistently kept one broad shoulder between the little girl — she seemed not all unwilling — and Cecil when he hovered near?

She carried about a wide dish brimming with apples, helping the negroes to serve the party. Annetje, too, had taken a plate up in her hands. Mary, watching her, saw that she filled it with a choice of food. Afterwards she stole softly from the hall.

Neal's glance was following her, as the Englishwoman paused to offer him her fruit. He also saw, in that searching gaze of his, how Miss Loveland regarded the vanishing figure with a little puzzled frown. Some way, he wanted to defend Annetje. "For her father?" he suggested tentatively.

"No," said Mary, and her tone was dry and harsh. "My cousin cannot eat of our late suppers. I do not know whither she is gone." She made a pretty gesture of waving the matter away. "What Annetje does, or leaves undone, is for Cecil, not me, to manage." Catching Eve's surprised look, she stooped a trifle, still smiling in her pleasant fashion. "My brother and Cousin Annetje are betrothed," she explained.

Neal grew very gay upon this, after Miss Loveland had passed on. Eve wished crossly that he were more sedate, behaving more like a man and less like an overgrown, spoiled child. Yet his outburst of relieved high spirits was not long in its continuance. Supper was followed by more dancing. Then the Albany folk went home.

As they took their leave, Neal felt attracted by Annetje Kierstiede's glance. It besought some-

thing of him, before her lips moved. She was white and worried. She breathed the words, while he took her hand : —

" Will you come, alone, to-morrow ? "

He inclined his head.

CHAPTER V

NEAL ADOPTS A COUSIN

"There is no such thing as an inconsiderable enemy." — WALTER SCOTT.

"ARE you going to the Widow Verbeeck's, my pretty boy?"

Neal felt almost guilty that he was not. "No, mammy, to the Bush," he answered, climbing into the sledge.

Maria stood leaning over the closed half of the entrance-door, her head cowled in her apron. She gazed lovingly after him. "Is there a nice lady where you are going, Master Neal?" she called.

He laughed back at her. "Three of them."

He was aware of what she was thinking. "One nail drives out another." She had never liked Eve Verbeeck. She followed the speeding sledge and its driver out of sight. "There is not anybody good enough for him," she reflected with fond tears. "But in the Bush, or elsewhere, he could find that minx's match."

His nurse's query started a brief train of reflection in Neal's mind. What a shame that Cecil Loveland should marry such a woman as Annetje. "He understands how to choose the best," said the lover bitterly to himself. Then he returned to the more pressing subject for consideration. What

could this summons mean? Why was he, a stranger, bidden to return so soon, and alone? He experienced a precious sense of power. He rejoiced that the juffrouw had thus looked to him for aid.

She was on the watch. As he entered the avenue leading to the Pasture, he beheld a tall, slim figure, in camlet and scarf, start from the corner of the stoop. The greeting she gave him was: "How thoughtful! You have not your sleigh-bells."

He sprang from the sledge as Annetje motioned to a slave behind her, who led the horse and vehicle away. This man also seemed prepared, and to understand exactly what to do. Neal ran up the steps to the girl. "I supposed," he said, answering her exclamation, "it were wise, when on a secret mission, as this appeared, to attract no attention to myself."

She gave him a steadfast gaze of her earnest eyes. "You are very wise," she whispered.

"That is not my reputation," was Neal's gay reply. "Still, one learns some caution, here on the frontier, hedged in by savages. Now, juffrouw?"

She was shivering with cold, and he wished to conduct her into the house. She hesitated, knitting her fingers, and avoiding his glance for the first time. "You are of Dominie Freylinghausen's congregation?" she asked in apparent irrelevance.

"Yes. My mother was Scotch, and a Presbyterian. But I have been brought up in my father's faith."

"And I in my mother's," Annetje smiled faintly, "who was of the Church of England."

"Ah! that accounts," he interrupted, "for our never meeting. You are a member of St. Peter's flock?"

"And of Albert Horton's company. Both facts brought about, as you say, our remaining strangers." But she was too interested in the present to drift into such side issues. "As for you, I take it for granted you have no sympathy with the Papists?"

"No," said Neal bluntly. "Have you?"

"Lady Anne is a Roman Catholic."

"I beg your pardon. That makes it all different. And now" —

Annette came close to him. She raised her head, and he bent his to listen. As idle fancies will, one drifted into his mind at that moment; he need not stoop to this girl as he must to little Eve. "Would you help a Jesuit priest, for the sake of Lady Anne?"

Neal stood perfectly quiet, regarding her. When not transported by childishly high spirits, his figure and face were as fixed as a tree, or a stone. This was one more of his Indian characteristics. Annetje regarded him with a kind of awe. It had been a daredevil, honest lad to whom she appealed, in her need, last night. This was a sober, judicious man. She shuddered, for she could not read a line of his purpose in his features. "There is no one else," she pleaded; "I should not ask it of you, if I knew otherwhere to go."

"So she would not ask the man she is to

marry," thought Neal, and he was glad. "I thank you for coming to me," he said aloud. "What can I do?"

Annetje gave him one look. He could have died for her when she looked like that, yet she did not speak. She selected a key from the ring at her girdle and opened the door behind them. They entered the main hall where a candle burned on the table. Annetje took it in her hand and led the way. "Down these stairs," she whispered.

They stole along a flight which took them to the basement. It contained two rooms, one on either side of the central passage. Annetje tapped softly on a door to the left. "It is I," she said in French, "the mademoiselle."

"Enter," called another voice.

The girl motioned Neal to follow. He inclined his head and passed through the low doorway. A very tall and muscular figure sat in the middle of what evidently served the household as a laundry. A cloak was thrown over the man's knees; his feet stood on a tiny stove, for there clung about the room that creeping cold which is part of an unused house. As the priest glanced up to greet them, Neal said to himself, "How much that man looks like me!" It was more, however, the unusual stature of both, and their common resemblance to the aborigines.

"This, father," said Annetje, "is a trusted friend, M. Cornelis Sleight. This," to Neal, "is Abbé Picquet's co-worker, Père Daubiny, from the mission of La Presentation."

"Known among the natives," continued the Jesuit, smiling, "simply as the Black Gown."

Neal could follow his speech, which was often used in a colony where Huguenots had settled. "And among the provincials, no less," he answered. "You wish, sir, to return to your people?"

He saw, now, what he was to do. Annetje was silent. Her part had been performed, and — rare virtue in a woman — she knew it to be so. She left the rest in their hands.

Father Daubiny rapidly explained the situation. He arrived here, some days before this, to pay one of his rare, flying visits to Lady Anne, rarer, of late, since troubles between the north and the south were approaching a crisis. The usual members of the household always welcomed my lady's confessor, but they were taken by surprise. Other visitors suddenly appeared, — Cecil Loveland and his sister. "I look for scant grace from a British officer," the Jesuit went on. "We dared not have them guess my presence. I was immediately concealed."

Annetje blushed. "I fear it is not altogether that," she acknowledged, "for M. Sleight has no less cause to hate the French. Yet, in the first moment that we met, I recognized him as your deliverer."

Neal's cheeks burned no less hotly than her own. He was proud of the praise for himself; he was relieved, as well, to see that, betrothal or no, she regarded Cecil Loveland with an instinctive

distrust. He asked her to have his sleigh brought to the stoop. He was sure this would be effected as secretly as possible. Then he told them both what he proposed to do, for he had instantly outlined a plan to himself. It was growing dark and, if Annetje would lend the Black Gown her mantle and scarf, he could so muffle the tall figure that, once seated in the sledge by him, it might pass, in an emergency, for the lady of the Pasture. The priest still clutched his cloak about him for warmth. Annetje wrapped him further in her camlet and bade him farewell before she turned to Neal. "I cannot thank you, but I shall remember. If my cousin were other than he is" —

Neal interrupted her shamefaced avowal. "Will you adopt me as a cousin? If you will, I shall have a right to serve you; nor could there be need for gratitude."

The adoption of cousins was a common and purely platonic practice in the province. "Yes," said the girl, and held out her hand to him.

At that moment the priest started up. "Who comes?"

"Oh, no one. There is no one here but ourselves." Yet, involuntarily, Annetje had sunk her voice to a whisper.

"There is a step on the stair," Neal interposed, "and the rustle of a gown."

"Mary!" said her cousin in a sibilant cry.

On entering, she pulled the bolt after her. She glanced at the door, to reassure her memory. Yes, but the bar had not shot home. She flung her

body against the panels in the instant that Neal, his eyes exploring the room, seized the Black Gown by both shoulders and pushed him into a closet near the fireplace. He crossed the floor again, pausing by the footstove. As he knelt here to warm his hands, Annetje cast him a questioning look. It spoke pathetic indecision, while a tap came from without.

"Open," Neal formed his lips to say.

The girl could not believe that she heard correctly. "What is it?" she inquired, to gain time.

There was no answer. Only the knock was repeated.

"Open the door," said Neal.

She lifted the latch.

"You, Mary?" called Annetje breathlessly.

Neal rose and strode to her side. "Miss Loveland! How fortunate you are come."

The spy stood as if transfixed on the threshold. She turned from one to the other great eyes of amazement and horror. Was this the secret upon whose track she had sped so fast since her arrival at the Pasture? An intrigue, and between those two, could not explain the riddle. Yet riddle there was. As fate had decreed that Cecil should marry his cousin, it appeared to Mary — who remained firm for the alliance when the man sometimes rebelled — that Annetje should be bound to them by every conceivable tie. The obvious mystery in the house might prove a link in the chain. So, in part from policy, in part from idleness, Mary listened and followed and pryed until —

this was the result! And the solution was the strangest part of the whole.

"Perhaps," began Neal glibly, for he had often found himself in situations worse than this, "you will send an order for my sledge to the stables, Miss Loveland. I am going on an errand for the juffrouw here."

"And he does not even lie," Annetje reflected, admiring his ease to the edge of worship. "Yes, Mary," she took up the tale, "I have besought Heer Sleight's good offices in a case in which I am interested. We were concocting a scheme of relief together when you came on us but now."

Mary had not opened her lips. She stood perfectly, terribly still. Neal offered her his hand. "May I conduct you so far as the stairs? And you will dispatch Pomp — is it Pomp, mejuffrouw? — to the stoop with my horse and sledge?"

It seemed to Mary that she did not recall her wits till she was halfway up the steps. Then she caught Neal's returning tread and his voice. "Now, juffrouw, for your last directions, please."

Annetje clutched his arm. "What shall we do?"

"Do? Why, convey the good father to the sledge. She will tell Pomp, will she not? He could surely signal if aught went wrong."

"Oh, yes. But Mary — you don't know Mary! She would not let it end that way. Perhaps she may warn Cecil and station him outside."

"In which event," said Neal calmly, "I shall trust to the night for my companion to pose as

you. And you will keep out of sight till time has passed for me to carry you to the Fuyck and bring you home again?" He spoke simply, although he realized what mischief this escapade could do Annetje — and him, with Eve. She gestured her agreement.

It was more than ever necessary to spirit the Jesuit away at once. Not far in the Bush, Neal had remembered, there lived a French hermit, called the Idolater from the Virgin's image in his hut. He was supposed to choose his lonely life as expiation for the fatal result of a duel; still, all concerning him, save his religion and his race, was conjectural. He could shelter the priest in his isolation, and could further his onward journey. Neal intended to carry the Black Gown thither to-night.

Pomp's scratch came on the shutter, and the three quitted the room together. They stole, unmolested, through the lower passage, mounting the stairs. In the summer parlor, as the great hall was known, Annetje lifted a finger. "There is some one talking outside. I am sure it is Cecil's voice."

"Stay you here," said Neal, and passed her with the priest. He opened the door to the stoop. "Keep close to me," he admonished the Jesuit; "I must hurry you into the sledge."

He peered through the darkness. It was Loveland. He stood by the frightened negro, whom he had evidently surprised.

"What is this?" he called in his shrill voice.

"Heer Sleight, can I believe my sight? And who is that with you?"

Neal paid no attention to him. "Careful, mejuffrouw," he directed, well-nigh lifting the priest to the sledge. "Here, boy, give me the reins, and make your mistress comfortable. Be quick."

"What is this?" Cecil repeated incredulously. "Annetje, that is never you?"

Neal whirled about to confront him. "And if it be," he thundered, "shall she explain to you? Stand back, sir, and let me have the road."

Cecil fell over on the horse, tugging at the headstall. "She shall account to me," he scolded, "ere she compromise herself. My cousin — a Loveland — to flee in the night, with a stranger!"

The priest sat, passive, not comprehending a syllable of what was said, only in an agony to be away. Neal glanced into the depths of the stoop. Was the door fastened? Had Annetje heard? — for she must not bear this shame. "Listen, sir." He leaned forward, whip extended. "The juffrouw is as far above you or me, as far above smirch of scandal, as if she were saint with God. Even the veriest rogue might see that, and know 't was a deed of charity which took her hence. I do not imagine you will assail your family honor by retailing what she has done. If you do, I shall lash you into ribbons. I warn you fairly of it."

He struck the impatient horse. With a plunge it pulled from the soldier's relaxed hold on the harness. They were at the gate of the avenue before Cecil found breath to speak.

When Annetje went to her father's bedside to tell him and my lady, whose chair was here, that the priest had left the house, both were surprised to see the traces of tears upon her cheek. The old woman would have let it go. It was the man who asked : —

" You do not fear Cecil suspects ? Nor that he will tell of you ? "

" No ! No ! "

" What is it, then ? " Barent Kierstiede demanded fondly.

" Before you say another word, bring me my smelling salts, child," said my lady, and sent her out of the room.

Upon Annetje's return her father's inquisitive humor had passed, but from time to time, throughout the evening, she felt his gaze, solicitous, tender, follow her everywhere.

Meanwhile Mary was soothing her brother, though her own heart beat quicker for his recital coupled to what she herself had seen. " It must have been, as Heer Sleight said, an errand to some afflicted soul," she urged. " He is betrothed — 't was Annetje told me of it — to the little juffrouw Verbeeck."

Cecil grew white. He had turned red when he was jealous of his cousin's intercourse with Neal : " How could she find that out ? " he questioned harshly. " I swear it is false."

" Why, you saw the two together. Was not that sufficient ? And moreover she wore silver shoebuckles, as Annetje showed to me."

"What then?" in the same, low voice of fury.

"It seems, so she explained, they are, hereabouts, the sign and seal of promise. Is n't it a quaint conceit? You may have grandmother's paste for our fair cousin, dear."

He did not answer her.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRIDEGROOM'S PIG

"What in this world is enough? More than we have."

No, Eve was not at home, the Widow Verbeeck said. She had gone to visit Albertse in her new house, and left word that it was uncertain when she should return.

Albertse and Teunis were married a few weeks before this time, — early spring, in Albany. Neal felt the more disappointed at not finding his sweetheart because he had scarcely seen her since the wedding, being harassed by preparations for his trading-trip, which was imminent and must separate them further for months to come. He was vaguely surprised, too, at the widow's withholding any invitation to enter the house. She stood in the doorway as if jealously guarding it.

While he strode disconsolately down Jonkheers Street, he spied in the distance a long, lank figure which he recognized. What was his father doing here? Where was he going up the hill? It added another puzzle to the young man's mind, since old Pieter was a person of uniform habits, who clung catlike to his home. Neal fretted unreasonably at the encounter, following his repulse.

"I 'll stop in the tavern," he concluded. "The boys may be there, perhaps, and their fun is what I need to shake me out of my doldrums."

The boys were there, — all who remained, now that Teunis had become a man. They greeted Neal enthusiastically over their tankards of beer, where the four flaxen heads bent together, deep in consultation. Neal seated himself and drew out his pipe. He was the only smoker among them, that art being acquired as preliminary to a trader's life, in which it warded off both ague and mosquitoes.

"The chimney yawns, Cornelis," cried Lubert significantly. He pointed to the deep-throated fireplace, where a great log shot out its flames.

Neal knew what he meant. "Who shall supply the victim?" he asked. He seemed to pitch from unfounded despondency into a wildness of mirth. "The bridegroom, I suppose."

"The bridegroom," came in a shout.

"And who shall fetch the pig?"

"I! I!" Every one volunteered. All of the five were covetous of this post of honor.

"We will cast lots," said their head.

The lot fell to him.

Followed by loud laughter and advice, Neal hastened out into the night again. There was no time to lose. While he could not hurry matters in the theft, it meant hours' work ahead of them to kill and dress the pig, and then to roast it at the inn. This was an all-night frolic, whatever expedition he used. He ran along between the rows

of button-trees, keeping in the shadow of the low, gable-roofed houses, and accosting none of the few wayfarers whom he met. They roared encouragement after him, for they understood his speed and secrecy. Teunis Schemerhorn's pig was to be a sacrifice.

There was no sense of wrong-doing in this primitive species of sport. Certain rules of honor prevailed, by which it was inexorably confined to the village. No one went to the Bush to steal. Nothing was secured under lock and key in Albany except the turkey and the pig, for nothing else was ever touched. It was a social drawback to matrimony that a Benedict might neither join a coasting party nor a turkey raid. On the other hand, he could guard his pens, which were always attacked during the honeymoon, and he could employ cudgel or fists, while it was considered base to strike the man whom one was robbing. Neither should a lock be broken to secure the prize. All depended upon agility and cunning. It was no light matter to steal a pig.

Neal reached the modest home which sheltered Albertse's regenerated ambition, and sped over the grass, past the well, to the back. He kept his attention fixed on the house, noticing, at once, that the front windows were dark. This did not look like company. He crept to the casement he was passing and peeped within. Teunis and the bride sat by the kitchen fire, the one smoking, the other busy with her knitting. There was no sign of Eve.

Her lover could not pause to question and ex-

plain this fact. He had other work on hand. He scaled the high board fence that shut in the live-stock, not yet sent out of town for the summer, hid himself round an angle of the cowshed, and waited. By the laws which obtained in these affairs, Neal must watch his opportunity, and steal inside the shed when a slave came out to take a last survey for the night. From years of practice he knew exactly what to do. Presently a man's step echoed on the board walk down the yard.

"That is no negro," Neal decided. "It sounds very like Teunis himself." He chuckled, hugging his body more closely into the corner.

It was Teunis, indeed. He carried a lantern and jingled his keys merrily together, this young householder. He unlocked the cow-shed, at the far end of which lay the sty, as a little reconnoitring had shown. Alas, poor bridegroom! he left the keys in the door. Neal snatched at them and sprang after the swinging lantern. Albany ways were so essentially the same that he guessed what he held in his hand. There was the turkey house at one side, the pigpen at the other, and Teunis would visit both to make sure all was right hereabouts. For that — but he must learn by experience — he should never place his dependence upon a single outer door. Neal's step was so light across the straw that Teunis did not detect his approach. The man of the house glanced into the sty. He came out, and entered the poultry-yard, to count his turkeys one by one. This was Neal's golden chance. He threw his arm across the door, hold-

ing it, while, with the other hand, he selected and turned the key.

Teunis instantly recognized the situation. "You rascal," he called, laughing, "let me out! Let me out, I say!" He battered on the door, but Neal only laughed in reply. "Who is it? Pedrom? Dirk?"

"Please, Teunis," said a gay voice, "may I beg the loan of your pig?"

"Neal? You scoundrel! I might have known it would be you."

Neal ran to the sty and made a dash, in the dark, for the youngster whom these epicures desired. He trod on the mother; he raised a din of grunts and squeals. Finally his supple fingers closed on the tender little body he sought. Meanwhile Teunis ceased neither shouts nor blows against the door. Neal was afraid he would rouse the slaves. "Why can't you be quiet?" he expostulated. "You know I 'm in a hurry. I could n't stop to fight your men, if this pig is to be cooked to-night."

"I will stop. On my honor I won't touch the pig, nor you, nor give the alarm; only — Neal, let me go too!"

Neal paused to argue, his precarious burden under his arm. "You are married, man. You know it is not allowed."

"Oh, but, Neal, just for to-night! I want to go so much! I would do it for you."

His old leader's heart was touched. He snapped the key. "Come, on then," he called. "But the boys will tease, you know."

Teunis did not care — much — for that, so long as he had the fun and the roast pig, for his share. They raced along the street together, towards the tavern, in their mad flight running plump against a little man just entering Lottridge's. Neal flung back a panting apology, above the squealing of the pig. It was the first time he and Cecil had met since he threatened to horsewhip the Englishman.

"So our merry young friend is pursuing his thefts — now women, and now swine," sneered Loveland, gazing after him. "They enter the provincials' inn. 'T is some boorish freak, of course."

Two hours later, after considerable wine had been consumed, and he had toasted Eve, the first of women, in deep potations, Cecil was emboldened to a reckless proposal. The memory of Neal and his prey remained a subcurrent in his mind throughout the intervening time. "A band of these fools," said he, "are supping on roast pig at their tavern. What say you, friends? Were it not a pretty sport to rob them of their dish?"

A cry arose. "Excellent. Most excellent. We will wipe out old scores."

There were always such claims to settle between the regulars and the men of Albany. "And I will be the captor," Cecil volunteered. "I have devised a plan, — a very cunning plan. You shall see me, directly, return in triumph, bearing the boar's head."

So, with shouts of exultation, and drunken praise and song, he was dispatched upon his errand.

Neal, seated among his reunited companions,

was startled, not long afterwards, by the entrance of the kitchen maid. "A gentleman to see you, sir," she announced.

"To see me?" Neal pushed his chair from the table. He remembered confusedly the sight of his father climbing Jonkheers Hill. "An old man?" he asked anxiously; "and did he inquire for Cornelis Sleight?"

The rosy maid pursed up her lips. "He wished to see Mynheer Sleight. But 't was a young man, — a little man, and an officer."

There was only one little officer in the world to Neal. He sprang upright. The others, looking on, wondered to see the bright face grow harsh and dark. "Where is he?"

The girl led the way to the kitchen, Cornelis, in great bewilderment, at her heels. She threw the door open, and he marched into the room. It was empty.

"The pig! The pig!"

Keturah gave a weird shriek, pointing to the chimney. The twine hung limply towards the embers: the roasting meat had been cut from it. Neal laughed, more relieved than annoyed. "Hush, wench," he commanded the sobbing girl. "Don't let the others suspect."

She dropped her apron from her eyes to gape at him. "Not let them suspect? Why, they will demand their supper."

"I mean — not till I get it back again."

He stood, deep in meditation, for a little time. This horseplay was so customary, he had been en-

gaged in so many encounters between the redcoats and the provincials, that his wits came readily at call. Like Cecil, too, his best endeavor was incited by the vehemence of personal feeling. "Lend me your apron," he said to Keturah, and, before she could collect herself to do more than blankly view the fire, he had stooped, untied the garment, and carried it to the woodbox. He scooped up into it shavings by handfuls, until it was packed to overflow. With finger on his lip and a final admonishing shake of the head, he ran out of the house once more, bearing the apron swung from its strings in a bundle over one shoulder.

As Neal was on his way down the street to Lottridge's, the English tavern, he encountered a negro, who stared hard at him in passing. After a step or two the slave wheeled about and came back. He accosted the impatient Dutchman. "'T is Mynheer Cornelis Sleight, is it not?"

Thereupon Neal recognized Pomp from the Pasture. He had not visited the place since the night of the Black Gown's rescue. In the mean time Lady Anne had twice sent for him to come and be thanked, and twice Eve's claim upon that particular day could not be set aside. He often thought of Annetje, but he had not seen her again. Now he was too preoccupied to take that home and its affairs into consideration. One member of the Loveland family was first to be settled with.

The negro held out a missive. "This is for you," said he. "I was told to deliver it into your own hands."

"From the juffrouw?" asked Neal.

"From one of them; not mine."

So it was Mary Loveland. What had she to say to him? Neal stuck the letter carelessly into his coat. Unhappily we cannot receive as well as send our letters. How shall we foretell in what varying mood from that which wrote them they may come to their own? He tossed the man a small coin and dashed on. Opposite the English tavern he paused and threw his load to the ground. Well out in the roadway, where there was no chance of damage either to Lottridge's, on the one side, or to the Widow Jenaverie's home, on the other, he built a pile of shavings and lighted it with his flint. It flashed into the night like a comet.

"Fire! fire!" shouted Neal, fleeing round the corner of the tavern.

Upon Cecil's return with the half-roasted pig, the entire company had adjourned to the kitchen to see it in its progress to toothsomeness. "'T is also quite upon the cards," remarked young Loveland, "that the fools attempt a rescue."

So they planted their chairs on the hearth, sitting, a genial semicircle, where they could gloat over their appetizing supper.

"Fire! fire!" the cry was brought to them. A glow lighted up the window. It must be close at hand.

They dreaded three things at Albany: the Indians, fire, and smallpox. In the lack of adequate extinguishing apparatus, even abundance of water

could not do away with a fear of the second evil. The soldiers were all on their feet and out of the door in an instant. Every one left the house.

Neal darted from behind the wall as the last redcoat sped past. He made one bound into the kitchen and another to the chimney. His knife glistened through the air. He cut the cord, seized the pig by its legs, and beat a rapid retreat. None too soon, for the cheat was at once detected. The shavings' flame had flashed up and died out. A group of sulky men stood by the bed of ashes.

"And our supper is gone while we are lured away," one mournfully observed. "'T is quite plain, nor of avail to so much as go to look at the kitchen fire."

Cecil sprang forward. "There! See, creeping out of yonder gate. That scamp hides something underneath his cloak."

They all gave chase, but Neal had no fear when it came to such a trial as this. He went like the wind down a lane he knew; he even played with them, and pretended to loiter, that they might seem to overtake his steps. He led them, finally, into a garden, where they stuck fast in the heavy soil. He opened a gate and closed it with a clang. He was close to the tavern's back, where he might step inside the kitchen, and the gate was bolted after him, — there could be no more pursuit.

Cecil Loveland, exhausted, gasping, tugging at his miry boots, heard a cheery voice which saluted him by name. He stared across the wall. Neal

stood in the open door, a glow of light from its waiting fire shining out in a radiant square. Against this background his figure was outlined. He held up the pig.

"My fine lieutenant," he called, "you are admirable as a spy. Yet, for some reason — how does it happen? — you never secure the prize."

CHAPTER VII

CECIL'S SHOEBUCKLES

"How can a man stoop lower than he is low?"
THOREAU.

NEAL gave no further heed to Mary's letter that night. In consequence it went completely from his mind, and only was recalled, a fortnight later, when Maria found it in mending his coat. He was shamed as well as perplexed by its contents: —

Will you come to see me to-morrow, Wednesday, at four of the afternoon? Ask for me, and do not fail. There is something I must say to you.
MARY GEORGINA CAROLINA LOVELAND.

And this was his answer! What must she think of him? So he was pricked by remorse, although he could not guess at the surrender of pride, the approach of despair, with which that answer was awaited. As day succeeding day crept into weeks, and Neal failed to visit the Pasture, this woman of the world, at first attracted simply, came, in her loneliness and monotony of life, to dream of him, to dwell upon the mystery of his last appearance, to raise an ideal in her heart, and to bow down before it. She analyzed her sensations pitilessly. "He is the first man I have

ever seen," she mused, "not a macaroni, nor a spendthrift, nor a gamester; the splendid, natural man."

Neal rode out through the beautiful May world, that afternoon, to answer her letter. He was shown into the dining-room, where Miss Loveland sat by a little fire. She was dressed with exquisite taste, and was radiantly charming. Such was her instinctive trust in him that, through hope deferred, she had thus waited, sure that some day he would come. She glanced up brightly from the book on her lap.

"I am running over my brother's lines," she announced, giving Neal her hand. "You know he is to take part in the officers' play next week."

"I did not know," said Neal grimly. He asked himself, could Eve have heard? She was so interested in that play. She coaxed him, every time they met, to go to see it with her mother and herself. But there, — he shrugged his shoulders, as he often did, at such thoughts, as if he would shake their weight from his spirits, — every one, old and young, more especially young, was interested in the officers' performance.

"The rehearsals are pushed vigorously," Mary continued, still smiling. "We hear of little else at the Pasture. However," eyeing the expressive face opposite her, "I did not invite you here to discuss 'The Beaux' Stratagem.'"

"Nor did I come hither," Neal responded, "to learn more of what I hear too much concerning at the Fuyck."

Mary's deep blue eyes took on an expression, infinitely becoming, of tender sympathy. "Remember," she hazarded, "that we women are not so strong as you, neither in mind nor in body. A little country girl may well be dazzled by this, her first glimpse of the outside world and its glories."

"I try to remember," said Neal. Miss Loveland need not imagine he would discuss Eve Verbeeck with her.

Again Mary hurriedly changed the subject, never relaxing her gaze upon his face. "This was why I sent for you. I wish to explain — I have been so unhappy because you did not come — mynheer, do you despise me for my strange action that night?"

Neal stared at her stupidly. She made so slight an impression upon him that every remembrance had departed of her share in the flight of the Black Gown. He caught at the allusion to his tardy appearance. "I forgot, till to-day, to look at your message," he confessed. "It was given me at a very busy time. But, so soon as I had read it, I obeyed its summons. I did not stay away from anger."

"Yet I must insist." Mary looked up earnestly. He had risen and stood by her chair. "I was not there to spy upon you. Cousin Barent became worse, and I went in search of Annetje. I was too bewildered, by finding you with her, to accomplish my errand. Yet I never meant to spy."

"Of course not," Neal rejoined, to soothe her. She seemed a good sort of woman, and probably she

spoke the truth. At any rate, it was safer to comfort her than to pursue the matter of that interview with Annetje, as he fancied she would prefer. His voice was gently kind in repeating vague phrases of confidence. Mary so enjoyed its soft cadence that she evoked a sob or two. She did not distort her features with weeping, but she brought the brilliancy of tears under her long lashes. Neal was touched. "Don't cry," he implored, leaning over her chair back. "Don't cry, I beseech you. Nobody thinks harm of what you did that day."

"Annetje does."

"Then you can tell her how it happened, just as you told me. She is so good, she cannot be inclined to believe any ill of others."

Miss Loveland had no disposition to pursue this path. She rose, looking shyly at Neal. She stretched out both hands. "I care most for your opinion," she said, scarcely above her breath; "and we are friends henceforth, you and I?"

"The best of friends." He grasped her hands.

This young provincial never suspected that the prettiest and the wiliest woman in the society of Town had tried her fascinations on him. He took his leave soon afterwards, inquiring, in his obtuseness, why the juffrouw Kierstiede had not appeared. "She is in good health?" he asked.

"Very good," was Mary's cool reply; "although her father is not. Both Lady Anne and Annetje are in constant attendance upon him."

This did not prevent her urging Cecil, when

he came in a little later, to lure the invalid's daughter out for a stroll in the orchard. "And then" — said she, holding out a pair of sparkling shoebuckles.

Cecil made a grimace. "Oh, not to-day. My head is full of Dorinda's lines. 'T is no time for philandering."

"'T is the time of times to win her," Mary suggested. "She is tired and harassed and fretted by incessant calls for action. In such a mood, many a woman has taken the first man who spoke a kind word to her."

Cecil twirled his stick by its ribbon irresolutely. "Confound her! This is all very easy for you. You have no faintest notion how I hate it."

"Hush directly. That 's not the proper frame of mind. Think of Cousin Barent's grant. Think of the Loveland patent joined to its acres. Why, 't would place you at the head of the patroons. Think" —

"Oh, I shall do it!" cried Cecil, and left the room.

Presently Mary saw him saunter past the window, accompanied by his cousin. They were on their way to the orchard. Annetje had thrown a cloak about her, and pulled its hood over her head. From its protection her pale face looked out, with a sense of refreshment, on the lines of billowing pink and white, as they walked between the trees. It was a joy to see this world, to breathe this air. She paid little heed to her companion; yet he was to be reckoned with.

"You are brighter already," he said, when they paused under the low, level boughs of an apple-tree. "You see, Annetje, how much good my medicine has done."

She pulled a branch towards her, and buried her face in its cool, sweet bloom. "'T is the best medicine in all the world — this," she murmured.

"Except — there is one thing better still."

Annetje did not stir. "Do you mean love, Cecil?" Her voice trembled.

"She does care for me," the soldier reflected, "and, by Jupiter, she is fetching now! If she were always soft and complaisant, I can understand how I might come to like the girl.

"Yes, dear," said he aloud. He drew nearer to her, raising his arm till his hand rested on that which lay on the bough. "Love is more to us than nature," he continued.

"It is nature," exclaimed Annetje suddenly, "and thus it can put down everything else that exists in the world, — reason, and pride, and one's wishes. What are they all, compared with the natural heart of man?"

Had Mary heard that outburst, she would have advised her brother to wait another season. For his part, he considered it an auspicious overture to his wooing. His left hand still on Annetje's, with the right he produced the paste shoebuckles. "Will you wear these for me, dear love?" he pleaded.

Annetje's eyes fell to see what he held. She started, as if awakened out of sleep. Yet all her

life she had known that this day and this speech must come to her. "No, no," she stammered. "Don't ask me! How can you ask me, Cecil?"

"How can I ask you?" he repeated. "Why, of what have we been talking?"

She collected herself instantly. "Yes, that is true. I was thinking of — I can't tell why I spoke so foolishly. But, Cecil," — she faced him in a new solemnity, — "you bear no love towards me, and I have none for you. I remember what our training has been, and all the reasons, despite that indifference, why we should wed. And I cannot do it. Can you?"

Her tragic manner failed to impress this listener. All his vanity grasped was the assertion that she found it impossible to love him. He was very angry. "I could not marry a woman who held me in such light esteem. No; there you are right," he answered.

"Nor, I hope and trust, whom you held no higher than you hold me." She averted her head. "Let us go back to my father. Put up your buckles, Cecil. We have tried. It is impossible."

Lady Anne left the sick-room on the girl's entrance. She saw there was much to be told old Barent which was not for her ears. "I could not promise, dear," Annetje began, as she knelt beside the bed. "To a child, it seemed easy, away far in the distance. When he came again, and was gallant and kind, it was not so hard to dream of. But since — but since he insulted me, the night Père Daubiny fled, I have been near to hating Cecil. I could never love him now."

His disease rendered it painful for the invalid to move hand or foot, and they tended him as if he were an infant. Moreover, caresses were of the rarest, in those old Dutch homes. Annetje did not recall a demonstration like that in which one gnarled, rheumatic hand stole out from beneath the covering to smoothe her hair. She nestled her head closer to the gray locks on the pillow, where she could not watch his face, and she questioned, in hurt surprise, if he heeded her wail. For his answer was: "I have always tried to give you what you wanted, Annetje. I wish I always could."

Meanwhile Cecil took a peculiar, masculine satisfaction in thrusting his head into Mary's room and announcing: "Well, it 's over and done with. I am rejected."

His sister started from her lounging posture. "What do you mean? Come here and tell me all about it."

"I cannot. I am late for rehearsal, as it is. Nor is there much to say. The heiress of the Pasture has declined my hand; that 's all."

Mary tapped her chin meditatively with her finger. "I believe she *was* attracted by him," she muttered, as if to herself.

"Attracted by whom?"

"Cornelis Sleight."

"Are you mad, woman? That savage! And she has seen him but twice. Ridiculous! You will be saying next that you, too, are in love with him."

For answer she turned a white, still face to his. He stared at its betrayal, shocked beyond possibility of speech; neither did she vouchsafe a word. After an intolerable moment Cecil slammed the door and departed.

He went into town, although he had no more thought of the rehearsal. In a desperate state that was compounded of many emotions, he met Eve Verbeeck as he climbed the hill to the fort. It was gone beyond coincidence that they should so often be in the same place at the same time. As usual, her blushing tremor soothed him. It was something to feel that his insignificant appearance could thus impress such beauty.

"Will you come for a stroll?" he implored, seeking to catch her glance, and holding her hand in his. "When I discover you and this perfect day together, I feel that should mean a walk."

"By the river?" she hinted, moving forward obediently.

"Nay, the river is well enough for an evening tryst. At present, the fishermen are there. Let us take — this way to the country."

He led her along what is now North Pearl Street, and was then bordered by sober residences, past which they came, by and by, to a mere woodland lane. There were no gossips to watch them here. Ordinarily, in their companionship, Cecil found sufficient spice from its secrecy, the sense of outwitting Neal, the effect his flattery had on Eve. To-day, what Mary had told him in her speech and her silence poured oil to the flame of his jeal-

ousy. It was fantastic that every woman should fall in love with Cornelis Sleight. Still, unfortunately, it was true. He felt as if he must strike at and crush the all-conquering boor. He began to boast, to tell Eve of his riches, of the Loveland patent which should be his at my lady's death.

"Can she not will it away?" asked the cautious Dutchwoman.

"Not she. It is entailed, and I am her husband's heir. Lady Anne is a feeble old woman. When she is gone, I shall be as great a landowner as the patroon."

"Then you will not notice me," observed Eve coquettishly, "the Widow Verbeeck's daughter."

"Or the wife of Cornelis Sleight." Cecil knelt to pull a bramble from her path. He regarded her downcast face intently before he rose to his feet. She betrayed more than her wonted timidity.

"Yes;" at length she spoke quickly, — "the wife of Cornelis Sleight."

An enormous pine had been felled near where they paused. Cecil seated himself on the stump. "Let us rest here awhile," he said. "I should like to talk to you."

Eve advanced, although slowly. "I am afraid there is n't room."

The man averted his head until his smile was gone. "It is a large stump," he replied.

She took her place tentatively, as if prepared for instant flight. Cecil immediately engaged her in conversation. "And when is your marriage

day?" he asked, striving to keep all bitterness from his tone. This was his first absolute assurance that marriage there was to be.

Eve plaited her kerchief between finger and thumb. "When Neal comes back from his trading-trip."

Thereupon Cecil lost his head. He had endured too long a strumming upon that one string. "I cannot believe it. A lovely creature who might shine at court, who might attract attention, no matter how high she were placed, and she content to give herself"— He paused abruptly. He dared not mention Neal's name as yet. One arm was stealing around Eve, who should have noticed, but then she was drinking in his compliments. That hand threw something glittering into her lap.

"What is it?" she screamed, and started. Cecil moved nearer on the stump. His arm was still around her. His face came close to hers.

"You could wear the Loveland shoebuckles, remember, if you would." What a soft whisper; yet it sank down into her soul.

Eve gazed at the pretty things, fascinated. She had never heard of imitations, and she saw diamonds, once, on Madam Van Rensselaer. This heap of sparkling stones, poured out on her knees, seemed the embodiment of Cecil's wealth. She gasped, although she spoke with dignity. "I could not wear them as Cornelis's sweetheart. You appear to forget."

Impelled by utter recklessness, Cecil crushed

her to him. He held her against his breast. "I forget nothing. You shall not throw yourself away on one of these fools," he hissed.

Eve pulled herself about till she confronted him. She meant to expostulate, to scold. Her humor changed at full sight of this wooer. The little pink and white face, the puny arms enfolding her, the very shrillness of his tones, wakened something akin to repulsion, and caused her to contrast him with Neal. "How dare you call him names?" she cried, breaking from his clasp; "Neal is no fool. It is true of me, though not of him. I have been a fool to listen to you so long. I never shall hear a word you say again."

CHAPTER VIII

"THE BEAUX' STRATAGEM"

"Grinding that stubborn corn, the Human Will." — CHARLES LAMB.

"FAITH," cried Mary, "you are a vastly pretty maid."

She stepped back to admire her handiwork. Those officers who were cast for feminine parts in "The Beaux' Stratagem" wisely gave themselves up to their womenkind to superintend their costuming before they went to the theatre. After Cecil's gown had been donned and his curling wig adjusted by his man, he sent for Mary and put himself at her discretion. With glee she painted, powdered, and patched his face; she drew lace mittens over his fingers and decked them with her rings. Finally, she threw up her arms in admiration. "Vastly pretty," she repeated, with a curious laugh.

Cecil understood that merriment when he sprang to the mirror and she followed him. They saw themselves reflected, standing side by side. They saw a woman of mature loveliness, of peachlike coloring, and soft, bewitching curves, her piquant features lighted by deep blue eyes and surmounted with a wealth of powdered hair. They saw another head, scarcely reaching above her bare white

shoulder, a mass of curls — but they were false — framing the delicate, small nose, the round cheeks, and the hard, light eyes to which Mary's touch of charcoal gave character. They saw the slight form that became its dainty gown, the hands that wielded well a fan — and what sort of man is he who looks like a pretty girl?

Cecil clenched his jeweled fingers savagely. "I would give the Loveland patent," he exclaimed, "to change skins with that fool."

A heightened crimson crept into Mary's cheek. She spoke hurriedly, heedless, in her nervousness, of what she said. "The patent will stand you in better stead, in the long run, brother."

There is a mood, commoner to men than to women, and commonest to Cecil's type of man, which impels one to set forth the worst side of the case. It seems thus to throw itself prostrate in the demand for sympathy, to strip off all disguise, and call madly for redress from fate. The quaint, small figure tossed its curls. "That 's all you know about it," said the peevish voice; "even a pauper provincial, like Eve Verbeeck, flings away the patent, to cling to her handsome boor."

"You have not given her the opportunity?"

Cecil bit his painted lips. He was vexed with himself for telling, and he vented his anger on Mary. "That is my own affair," he replied haughtily. "I shall choose a wife for myself, not for you."

His sister did not reply at once. So that was what he thought: he should choose a wife for him-

self! Well, they both might see the outcome of this resolve. "I did not mean to be intrusive," she said at last, and very gently, "only — I was taken by surprise. I confess the idea never occurred to me that that little country girl could be lady of our manor."

There was something sickening in his masterful humor clothed in Dorinda's dress. "I fancy," he sneered, "it were better did neither of us pause to dwell on low attachments for the burghers of Albany."

"Hush!" said Mary quickly. "There is some one at the door." She ran to answer the knock.

Lady Anne, leaning on her cane, and Annetje, in her best gown, were come for a glimpse of Cecil. It was hard to acknowledge him as other than the gay little lady he appeared. Annetje felt her embarrassment subside at this vision, and she and my lady twirled him about, admired, and twittered in merriment.

"You consider me a success?" demanded Cecil of the tall girl kneeling before him to straighten his flounce.

"Why, all the men will lose their hearts to you," she said. "Will they not, Mary? Will they not, Lady Anne?"

"He is very like his mother," the old Englishwoman rejoined.

At this speech a shadow fell across their mirth. Mary gathered up her belongings. All three cloaked, and, their crimped hair wreathed in scarves, the young people took a soberer departure.

They drove into Albany together. Cecil climbed from the carriage, at the door of the improvised theatre, and ran briskly around to the stage entrance. The girls entered the room under the escort of a bystanding officer, an acquaintance of Mary's.

A hush of intense excitement sent a thrill through the waiting audience. Tea at the Pasture had been hastened to enable the play-goers to reach the barn where the performance was given, before sundown. But Albany's suppers were hurried, too. The cousins found the place crowded when they were shown to their seats. On the benches along the wall sat a score of young men together. Both Mary and Annetje, settling their rustling skirts, pulling out their spreading fans, saw one dark head overtopping every other. They found Eve Verbeeck, as well, beside her meek mother, trembling with eagerness, her look more infantile than usual in its anticipation of delight. Many of the Dutch girls present had adopted the pointed bodice and the hoop of the London mode. Eve still wore her short gown and striped petticoat.

"Sadly provincial," Mary murmured.

"And a trifle common," said Annetje.

In her own mind, though she would not betray it so openly as Eve, she also felt a childish agitation, as if that rough stage opposite the door, with the green curtain swung across it, shut out fairyland. Perhaps there was not, in all that gathering, a heart which did not beat the faster. Certainly, save for the few English, and those colonists who

sometimes visited New York, no one had ever seen a play. Promptly at six o'clock a whistle blew its peremptory blast. Every one started. The curtain rolled up and disappeared.

But what was this? Who were these gallant adventurers, quick with wise and witty sayings, whom critical observation recognized, despite their strange attire, and who sought to beguile the hard-headed Dutchmen into believing them other than they were? Decayed gentlemen, indeed, seeking their fortunes by an artifice! Aimwell and Archer, forsooth! Albany knew better than that.

Not for long. The story unfolded; scene followed scene. More and more it became real to the listeners, whose senses were stolen away. Modern skepticism will not be sung to sleep by less than the perfection of cheats. The country town of one hundred and fifty years ago, the borderland of civilization, was frankly open to impressions. Prejudiced as the Dutchmen were, regarding their entertainers with a hereditary hatred, they knew little of pretense except the slyness of trade. They knew little of pleasure, either, in its cultured, clever forms, and scarcely more of beauty. The bare boards, the rude attempt at furniture, the impossibilities to which they must shut their eyes, were all, in the end, forgotten. It was as if they were mesmerized by the pungent humor, whose coarseness evoked nothing deeper than a blush, or a bashful glance, by the merry actors who loved their parts, and threw themselves into the fiction after a headlong fashion marvelous to the Hollanders.

No one really comprehended what it was all about. Philip Schuyler, certainly among the most intelligent of the spectators, wrote to a friend an account of that performance, and declared Farquhar's "Beaux' Stratagem" to have been "The Conscious Lover," by Richard Steele.

Into those slow and sordid lives had come an Arabian Night. Father Foigard roused the first show of feeling. They hated the Jesuits fiercely, and rejoiced to see one here depicted to gratify their spite. Neal found himself clapping his hands, of course leading the others of his company. Presently they were roaring at the fun, shouting over detestable Squire Sullen; they were interested in the deeds of Lady Bountiful, in — Who was this?

So complete had grown the illusion to those simple souls, so entirely had Neal, for one, been drugged into crediting what he beheld, that it was like a dash of water in his face when he saw Cecil Loveland mince and coquet his way across the stage.

"Damme," quoth Dirk, "that 's a pretty girl."

He bent forward nearly double to stare, entranced, at the newcomer. Neal stiffened himself on his bench. "'T is no girl," he growled. "Don't you know the fellow? 'T is Lieutenant Loveland from the fort."

Dirk's open mouth slowly closed. "As I live, it is." He smote his knee with his broad palm. "But how pretty" —

"Hist," commanded Lubert impatiently. "I want to hear what he says."

Neal did not glance at the stage again while Cecil remained on the scene. He fixed his attention on Eve, and watched her watching Dorinda. The little, light figure tripped to the footlights, — such as they were, — bending its painted face, its beguilement of patches and curls and darkened brows, full on the widow's daughter. The phrases the thin, high tone was uttering were said to her alone.

"'If I marry my Lord Aimwell, there will be title, place, and precedence, the Park, the play, and the drawing-room; splendor, equipage, noise and flambeaux'" —

Surely, never was stranger wooing. Neal sat petrified by a hideous fright. Eve was bewildered, he could see, and alarmed, and yet she was drinking it in. The prompter whispered sharply to Cecil to vary his posture. As if in obedience, he sprang gracefully one side. Lifting a mittened hand, from which the ruffle fell away, he called in the lively voice of musing on some possibility: —

"'Hey, my Lady Aimwell's servants there! Lights, lights to the stairs! my Lady Aimwell's coach put forward. Stand by, make room for her ladyship.'"

His fellow soldiers in the audience gave him a round of applause. The speech deserved it for gusto and keen realization of a girl's day-dreams. But Cecil had not finished his lines. Dropping his voice to a depth of conviction, his scrutiny wandered out once more over the spectators. As if unconsciously, it rested, for a second, on Eve Verbeeck, while he said: —

"'Are not these things moving?'"

Neither she nor Neal perceived all that came to pass after this, while Annetje and Mary were affected only in a less degree. "What could he mean by such a display?" the former exclaimed, under cover of a laugh.

"I cannot conceive," his sister wearily confessed, "other than a sudden apprehension of the apposite words, and how they might torment the man he detests. Cecil is made up of moods." She sighed, and turned back to the play.

It had been, as she suspected, a whim. In his wiser moments he never intended to marry the provincial, — he who could mate with the best. Yet it was sweet to taunt Neal Sleight. It was something, he said between his teeth, while he flirted his fan and giggled, to remind the girl who dared to reject him — for Neal — of all she surrendered to her love.

On their homeward way the widow trotted along by Neal, shaking her "mush-melon" bonnet, and muttering an accompaniment to Eve's chatter.

"Dominie Freylinghausen will be angry at this," said Eve's mother. "We have never seen the like at the Fuyck before. He will make us smart for this."

"Why should he," the girl expostulated pettishly, "when it shows how far in the woods we are that we never have seen the like. Think of all we miss, — the plays, and the dress, and the fine carriages" —

"'The noise and the flambeaux,'" Neal quoted,

speaking for the first time. "So you long to see the world, Eve?" His tone was not so angry as wretched and spiritless. "You know how gladly I would give you everything you wish for," he added, while her mother was, as often before, conveniently self-absorbed. "I did not realize until to-night the paltriness, at its utmost, of what I have to offer."

"I don't want more," Eve insisted, in the same rapid undertone. "More, I mean, than I could share with you. Yet, Neal," in a louder key, "I can't help planning — and there is no harm in that — for us both to have money and to travel, some day, beyond this dull Albany of ours."

He made no reply, for now he was enraged. This was the first time he had heard Eve call her home by its English name, and it implied to him more than her assurance of personal loyalty could overcome. Vrouw Verbeeck, on his other arm, was maundering along in repetitions of her dread of the dominie, and denunciations of what she had just seen. Neal and Eve were too accustomed to her monologues, too interested in each other, to pay much attention.

"And to do it now," said the widow, "when the French are rousing the savages against us, when, at any hour, we may find ourselves scalped in our beds! It is no time for spending a night in telling and listening to lies."

"Oh, mother," shrieked Eve, thus brought back from her cajolery and Neal's sullenness, "how can you say such horrid things? Scalped in our beds, indeed!"

"I appeal to Cornelis. Might not the savages fall on us, now, any day, from the north?"

"Why, no," he answered in clumsy irony. "What is the garrison for except to protect the town? You must not forget the soldiers, mevrouw. They who play the part of maid so well we look to for defense."

This palpable and not very ingenious thrust at Cecil had its natural effect in rousing Eve's sense of justice. "There is no reason to doubt their bravery," she said stiffly.

Still, the girl did love Neal, after her fashion, and his departure from her drew near. Pieter Sleight came up the hill, aimlessly, it appeared, directly after the widow had gone into the house, leaving the lovers on the stoop. He said he was searching for Neal, waiting to walk home with him. His son manifested some surprise, the incident being without precedent, but Eve was quite at her ease, and invited him to go and talk with her mother while she bade Neal good-night.

When they were left alone again, she seated herself on the bench. "Come here by me," she commanded.

Neal always enjoyed such mandates. It was charming that this slip of a woman should order him about. He felt good humor returning, while resolved not to yield, — not yet. He threw himself upon the bench at some distance away from Eve.

She slid along towards him, curling one hand into his. "Please, Nealie," she murmured, her cheek against his sleeve.

He recalled the old, coaxing ways of the child Eve without a smile for their memory. She raised her other hand and daintily stroked his face. "I could not help it," she insisted. "Am I to be blamed for Lieutenant Loveland's folly? I hated it all as you did: every bit as much." For the instant she thought this true. "How could I help it, dear? I never dreamed he would say such things, nor say them straight at me."

Sharper ears than Neal's might have noted the touch of vanity in the ring of that last clause. Neal was not sharp, and he very much wanted to be beguiled. He caught her up to him, kissing her hair, her eyes, and her lips. The pain of parting was sore in his heart. He felt that he had never loved Eve as he loved her then.

"Of course it was not your fault," said he. "I see now what I loathed was the thought of all that bedizened ape could pour into your life, and how little my best showed by comparison."

He might well entertain some apprehension. When, at length, Eve slept, after her eventful pleasures, such words they were which still rang in her ears: "'Stand by, make room for her ladyship! Lights, lights to the stairs! my Lady Aimwell's coach put forward.'"

Truly, these things are moving.

CHAPTER IX

PINXTER

"It is a good wind that blows nobody ill."

THE widow was justified in her prediction, for Dominie Freylinghausen did not conceal his anger at the play. Upon discovering that the soldiers felt encouraged by their success to repeat the entertainment and give Albany an opportunity to see "The Recruiting Officer," he administered a public reprimand to all countenancing those who "assumed the characters of knaves and fools and robbers; who painted their faces, a sin against God and nature, and especially those who degraded manhood by donning female habits." The town was in an uproar. The officers would have laughed off the rebuke, but it was not easy to bear the horror with which they found they were regarded by the older, the more sedate part, of the villagers, or the young men who, for causes grounded in envy, took on an air of self-righteousness, while the giddier element alone was on their side, — girls whose heads were turned by the novel glories of the theatre. When, one night, Neal Sleight pushed past him, on the road from the fort, as if the young lieutenant had been invisible, Cecil stamped his foot, choking with rage.

"I could kill that fellow," he muttered to his companion, adding a string of oaths. "Again and again he has come in my way, and I have always missed my chance. If I could but run him through the body and be done with him!"

"He looks to me," observed Ensign Hurst, following Neal's departing figure with reluctant admiration, "as if he might not remain quiet for you to do it, Loveland. Is there no other fashion of paying off the fool?"

It certainly did not lessen Cecil's hatred to know, for himself, that his threats of personal injury were idle; that Cornelis was, indeed, physically too strong for him. He also regarded the tall fellow striding carelessly on into the distance, indifferent to him and his threats, — so long as they did not involve Eve Verbeeck.

"And he has to leave Eve behind, when he goes away," Cecil reflected, continuing aloud: "He departs soon for the wilderness. Let us pray he may not return."

"In that case," said Hurst lightly, "you can surrender your revenge to the Indians. They are sure to scalp him."

The careless speech found a congenial corner in Loveland's mind. He desired to see his rival maimed as well as injured, — disfigured. "They are sure to scalp him," he repeated over and over to himself. Yes, that, of all things, would be a satisfaction.

Neal cared nothing whatever for him at present, Eve having lulled his suspicions, and his attention

being diverted elsewhere. It was not until, on the following day, he learned of the indignity put upon the dominie that he remembered his encounter with the soldiers. They had met at the low stoop of the parsonage. Cecil — now he recalled the fact — bent, as he overtook the two, and dropped something on the steps. At the time Neal supposed the clattering sound an accidental blow to the swinging sword, which tripped the officer and made it difficult for him to recover his balance. Now it came back to him, like a picture in a book. Young Loveland it was who had insulted the dominie. For that good man — albeit domineering and officious, he was a veritable saint — had found at his door the strongest of hints. There lay a stick, a pair of shoes, a crust of black bread, and a Lyon dollar. He read the legend right. The stick drove him out of town; the shoes were for the journey, and the money and the bread should support him on the way. The dominie was sensitive to morbidness. This last blow literally broke his heart. However, his story and its romantic close do not belong here, — nothing but the consequences.

"I wonder if I can leave the Fuyck without horsewhipping that dog." So Neal put the matter to himself, and chafed, from another point of view, as Cecil had done, at the impossibility of a trial of strength between them. It would be like fighting a woman; yet this last provocation was strong.

He knew he was certain to meet the lieutenant some time in Pinxter week. All the world of

Albany assembled then on the hill (where the old State Capitol stands) in the rear of the fort. It was for this festival that he postponed his journey. He could not carry off Little Prince, who was to accompany him, till the negro had enjoyed his yearly taste of freedom. Whitsuntide was the slaves', — given up utterly to them, — during whose seven days they deserted their masters and followed their own devices. No one issued a command while Pinxter lasted, and it was an annual treat to visit the scene of frolic and look on at its sports. Neal and Eve climbed Pinxter Hill side by side, though the old company were all together, Albertse matronizing them. It was a curious picture upon which they gazed, when the summit was reached, — one that, viewed year after year, never lost its element of savage and childish gayety. A negro, called King Charley, was leader in the revels, decked in a discarded military coat of tarnished red and gold, a tiny cap perched on his shock of wool. He sat astride a hollow log, both ends of which had been covered with skins, whereon he beat as if they were drums. He was accompanied by other slaves, who held eel-pots, also converted into musical instruments. A weird chant, brought by their ancestors from Africa, led a frenzied dance. Side-shows of various kinds abounded, and among the gingerbread booths was strolling, as Neal had surmised, every one of consequence in Albany.

Cecil Loveland approached them boldly. He had not spoken to Eve since the day she refused

his buckles. "I hope I find mejuffrouw well?" he said in his soft voice, bending over her hand.

She answered confusedly, for remembrance of the theatre and Dorinda's pointed speech, of the talk in the lane, when they sat on the stump together, mingled with her sight of Neal's cold scorn as he drew himself aloof. In her agitation she committed a blunder at the start. "You know Lieutenant Loveland?" she pleaded, and looked across at her lover.

If she intended to convince Neal she would take no part in a conversation not shared by him, he was loath to be thus placated. "I not only know him," Neal replied in a meaning voice, "but I know somewhat of him and his doings, last night, perhaps guessed by but one other person in the world, — that gentleman there." He pointed out Ensign Hurst, who was swaggering past.

Cecil flushed uneasily. He was beginning to realize, by the hubbub it had created, what his thoughtless act had been. Still, he was not deficient in courage. "You are quite at liberty," he answered, "to share your information with whomsoever you will."

Neal bowed to this bravado. He took a boyish, teasing satisfaction in concealing his purpose, whether it were to speak or to be silent. "Come, Eve," he said to the bewildered girl, "this matter to which we allude is unfit for a woman's ears. Let me lead you away."

Of course it was foolishness, that exclamation and his pinnacle of purity. He was invariably

like a bragging schoolboy, he told himself, before this dapper little man who had seen so much more of the world. And Cecil told himself the same thing. He stepped between the two. "Let the lady judge," he cried. Eve liked being called a lady. "Mejuffrouw, 't was I left the dominie his gifts. Is that too vile a deed to so much as mention in your presence?"

Neal had overshot his mark. Eve felt rather sorry for Cecil, he looked so hot and ashamed. "I am not of the dominie's party," she announced with some stiffness of demeanor. "I regret you should hurt him, mynheer, but the act is no crime to me."

"Thank you," said Cecil smartly, "I care only for your opinion."

"Which is, it seems, on the regulars' side," Neal interposed in the hoarse voice of restrained passion.

"Not necessarily." Eve tossed her head. "All I acknowledge is that I resent commands, from Dominie Freylinghausen, or — or any one."

Before Neal could recover his composure a light touch fell on his sleeve. "Good day to Heer Sleight," said a low, sweet tone close to him.

Mary Loveland had disengaged herself from Annetje's company, whom they attended. After watching this trio from a distance, it was not hard to convince herself that the part of discretion lay in separating Neal from her brother. He wheeled about and spoke to her, asking himself why she blushed so becomingly. Their last interview

meant a distinct advance to Mary; it had vanished completely from his mind.

"And is the juffrouw in good health?" said Mary, giving her hand to the girl. "Cecil, Annetje is looking towards us as if she would have speech with your companion. Will you conduct her thither?"

While Neal hesitated to take a step in the matter, or to choose what step to take, Mary's fingers lay on his arm. She was guiding him in one direction and Cecil led Eve in another. How had it come about?

"What is this I hear of you, Neal?" pursued the woman's charming voice. "Can it be true that you are going away?"

"Yes," he responded coolly, with a backward glance towards Eve. "I start in a fortnight's time."

"For the western lakes? So I have been told."

"Why, as to that," he answered, "I go to trade with the Indians. Nowadays one must search far afield for peltries."

"Shall you be long away?" The manner grew tenderer with every word.

"I hope to return by snowfall. If all goes well, I may accomplish it."

Mary gazed up at him quickly, as if grieved beyond concealment. "What terrible uncertainty and danger lie in such a journey," she faltered; "it will be a prolonged torture for — for any one who loves you."

Neal's expression softened until it became di-

vine. "I would not torture her for the world," said he. "And it is a comfort to think, though she looks such a slight little thing, she has a woman's endurance. That means she has more than a man's."

Miss Loveland's fan snapped in her fingers. "Eve should have endurance and faith and all things good to belong to you," she left as a last word with him. The next instant he was puzzled to see she was jesting with an officer they met, and seemed glad to be rid of her first escort. He took himself off, feeling as if he were struggling through a maze, fine as cobweb, tenacious as steel wire.

"What made her speak like that?" he questioned, rubbing his brow with his hand. "Was she making game of me? Or what was it? And does she imagine she could make me believe I am too good for Eve?"

In his simplicity he had hit on the solution. Mary hazarded her gross praise, remembering his modesty, and remembering, as well, the long days and nights to come, in which he would recall every last act and speech before he left his home. "Nor will he forget the speaker, perhaps," she further concluded. Yet those few sentences with Neal had shown her more than this. She appreciated how much she cared for him, and likewise how much he cared for Eve. She set her teeth together, seeing him pass through the throng, while apparently she had no eyes save for the man with whom she laughed and measured wits. Her lips

were uttering all manner of pretty things. Her heart spoke as well, and that was saying: "There *is* no fool like an old fool. That this infatuation should come to me, of all people! I understand what it implies. I must sacrifice Cecil; he is needed to carry Eve Verbeeck out of my path. It is hard, — hard everywhere I turn. Perhaps it never goes easily when a mature woman falls in love with a boy."

Neal did not find his sweetheart to reward his search. Annetje, to whom he applied, fancied she had wandered on with her cousin. The mistress of the Pasture chanced to be alone. He could not leave her thus, and said he would wait there, if she permitted it, till the pleasure-seekers returned.

They seated themselves on a log, where he spread her cardinal. "You are pale and tired," he observed.

Annetje leaned back to pull from the underbrush an armful of the azaleas which abounded on the hill. Neal came to her assistance. Now and then their fingers met as they worked among the flowers. "It is that I am shut into my father's sick-room," she began hurriedly, while this was going on. "He sent me out to-day, protesting I must not lose what enjoyment came in my way. Otherwise I seldom leave him. The worry and the confinement, — they are sufficient cause for my lack of comeliness."

She spoke piteously, gazing across at him over the pile of rosy bloom heaped up in her lap. She was thinking of Eve's dimples and pink cheeks,

as she had seen them a moment ago. And it was Eve's lover who told her she looked pale and tired.

Neal regarded her in his straightforward honesty for a second's silence. Annetje gave a sighing laugh and raised an azalea branch to screen her face. He took it away from her. "I believe," he began deliberately, "that you are lovelier than ever. I may say that of my cousin, may I not, Annetje?"

Although he had forgotten his last conversation with Mary at the Pasture, he remembered his compact with this girl. Mary called him by his name, and he did not so much as notice it. Yet he said Annetje as if they had known each other always.

"Your cousin is very proud to hear it," she answered gently. "Now tell me — they say you are going away?"

Neal repeated, at greater length, what he had already told her cousin. He liked to talk to Annetje Kierstiede; he never had been conscious of liking to talk before. She was sympathetic, without curiosity, and her interest was absolutely true. Naturally, therefore, she was the perfect listener — to him. He related his plans, and his hopes, how many furs he meant to secure, and how he should carry them to New York. There they might be converted into money, and afterwards he would embark for the West Indies, perhaps. The sugar and rum and molasses he brought thence were to lay the foundation of his future for-

tunes. "Some day," he said, "Eve shall have all the pretty things she likes."

"Does she like pretty things so much?"

Neal nodded. "What wonder? She could set them off to perfection."

Annetje glanced down from the flowers in her lap to the rich gown beneath them. "And, poor little girl," she said kindly, "she has not learned what measure of happiness they bring." Hastily changing her tone, she went on to inquire: "If all goes well, you will surely come back to the Fuyck by winter? It must mean something wrong, if you are further delayed?"

"Oh, no. A hundred things might happen to keep me. You see, I shall have to reach the river before it closes, — and that may easily be prevented, — or I must wait till it opens in the spring."

Annetje innocently repeated this remark to Mary that night at the Pasture.

"Here are Cecil and the juffrouw now," she observed, looking into the crowd. "I think I shall ask him to drive me home in the gig. I have left father too long." She rose and reached out one hand, holding her flowers to her with the other. "Good-by, Neal. I wish you every success in your journey. Be very sure of my interest."

"Thank you, cousin. Good-by." He went up to Eve, leaving Cecil free to act as escort.

It might have been better for Neal's love affair were his sweetheart not so confident. There remained no ground for self-distrust on her part,

since Albertse had been swept aside. She understood her power, and that, if she chose to exercise it, she could put away from him the remembrance of that disagreeable episode concerning the dominie and the side she took. Without a twinge of apprehension she saw from afar the conference just concluded. Cecil noticed her cool, slightly amused regard, being tempted, for one mad instant, to crush it by describing the scene he had witnessed in the Bush, when he stood beside Neal's sledge. With a happier second thought, he refrained. He had made friends once more with Eve. He would not undo his work by rousing a jealous interest in Cornelis Sleight.

"'T is best for her to forget him outright." Thus his reflections ran and continued through the homeward drive. "So many things may happen in five months' time!" The conclusion was very sweet.

Annetje, beside him, echoed his thought. And it caused her to sigh.

CHAPTER X

TO THE WILDERNESS

"Thy friend is always thy friend; not to have, or to hold, to love, or to rejoice in, but to remember."

"THE worst of all is, father," Neal observed, glancing across the table, "that you will be left so entirely alone."

The old man hesitated, looked rather silly, Neal fancied, and opened his mouth as if about to speak. Then he closed his lips again, gazing vacantly at his son. "I shall rub along some way or other," at length he answered. "Maria and Prince will take good care of me."

Little Prince, who was serving them, wished his parents had been present to appreciate the joke of this compliment. He grinned over the pitcher of buttermilk he held. "Everybody except Master Neal," he reflected, "knows about the change that is coming. It 's strange he is the only one on the place who fails to see."

It was strange, truly, that the meanest slave his father owned should understand the present situation more fully than the child of the house; not so strange, possibly, if Neal's absorption in his plans and his slowness of suspicion were taken into account. Old Pieter appeared anxious to turn

the subject. "It is you I think of most," he declared, plying his knife and fork. "Just now, when the Schaghticokes are on the warpath, seems a sorry time to send you away to the wilderness."

"But I am not going among the Schaghticokes," Neal responded. "Little Prince and I shall be out of sight or sound of hostilities before a fortnight is passed."

Much had occurred in colonial affairs since the day Neal inaugurated his trading-trip by asking of his father $40, a canoe, and a negro boy. While he was expending the money in duffels, beads, guns, and powder for truck, the long contest between French and English for mastery in America was approaching a decision. Step by step, for one hundred and fifty years, the two nations, one from the north, one from the south, had crept into the country. Within a twelvemonth of the first successful English settlement in Virginia came the first successful French settlement at Quebec. On the day Henry Hudson pushed up to the site of Albany, Champlain was nearing him from Canada. Again and again differences arose between the rival powers. The French interfered with the colonial fisheries. The French, by their tact, won the natives to their cause. The French were now preparing to hedge in the southerners by a line of forts from Niagara to the Gulf of Mexico. The French were burying leaden plates "as a monument of the renewal of possession," and carving the lilies of Louis XIV. on the trees in the Ohio valley. The French guarded the western river with

troops against its occupation by the trading company to whom the British government had ceded it. Two years before this summer the French attacked the Miamis, allies of the English, and the Indian king was killed and eaten.

England, so far, would do nothing. Nor did the colonies feel encouraged to stand alone.

"We each consider the other," Neal broke the silence to say with an uneasy smile. "You fret because I shall go into the woods, and I because you and — and all the Fuyck — will be seeing warfare, perhaps, while I am not at hand to protect my own."

"There is the garrison," his father replied. "It will be a comfort, when you think of us, to remember we have the soldiers here."

Neal caught the sound of Little Prince's chuckle. Despite his heavy heart, he could not resist a sly glance at the negro. "I do not doubt," he answered grimly, "I shall often recall the fact that the soldiers are at Beverwyck."

They pushed back their chairs and rose. "Let us go early into the town," the inquisitive old man suggested. "I want to hear what has happened."

Neal entertained a twinge of self-pity. It was bitterly hard for him to face the truth that this was his last day at home. He marveled to see his father finding room in his mind for other interests than this, and eager as a boy to be diverted by a show. Youth could not interpret the spirit of age, nor understand that, as this dull, difficult life goes on, one is prone to watch every alleviation

from fate; to cheat one's self with side issues; to accept second-bests.

They discovered the town in a turmoil, the militia called out, the half-naked survivors of an onslaught at Dutch Hoosic, thirty miles away, fled to the fort for refuge. From the northern woods were borne to the villagers' ears yells and defiant shots, showing where the pursuers lurked. The commissioners of the colonies were in session at Albany, considering a scheme of federation presented, though not originated, by Postmaster-General Franklin. That scheme anticipated another which, twenty years later, was named the Declaration of Independence.

The call for a council of the Six Nations had been tardily answered. Neal and his father were stopped, in their progress along Handelaars Street, by many anxious men, who whispered, buttonholing them and tapping out the information with the aid of a forefinger, that ominously few Indians were here. Hendrick, the Mohawk chief, attended the conference only to sneer at the weakness of the fort. The white sachem, William Johnson, was present, yet in other guise from that worn at a previous council when, painted and decked like a savage, he entered Albany at the head of a band of warriors, and, marching up Jonkheers Hill, saluted the fort, which threw open its sally-port.

While the burghers thus discussed the situation, Jasper Douw, one of those men who are drawn to gossip as a bloodhound to its prey, dashed down the street from the fort. In front of the Dutch

church he ran into the Sleights in a cluster of wagging heads.

"A post-rider has just appeared," he called. "Bad news!"

"What news?"

"Young Colonel Washington has been defeated at Fort Du Quesne."

This meant that the English flag was driven from the valley of the Ohio. Jasper looked terrified and yet exultant. It was a direful message which he brought, but, at least, he was the messenger.

"There will be war henceforth," said he, "from the Monongahela to the St. Lawrence."

Old Pieter drew his son one side. "Do you still go on, Neal?" he inquired.

The young fellow bit his lip; between his eyes were heavy lines. What should he do? To give up the expedition for then was to give it up for the year. This contest must be long drawn out. The same reasons held good to tie him to Albany for, it might be, a decade more. What would Eve say? Dare he leave her? Neither he nor his father seriously considered if he dare go.

The girl made light of his apprehension, when he sought her, accompanied by old Pieter, who would not be shaken off. She pointed out so many causes for his departure, between them they found so few for delay, that his original plan was adhered to. He started on the following day. At sunrise Little Prince pushed off the canoe and paddled down the stream to where Neal was to meet him

and to part from his friends. This was always an imposing and pathetic ceremony. Pieter Sleight accompanied his son to the spot; Maria and Prince followed; the Widow Verbeeck brought her daughter; all the old company were there.

Neal went from one to another, bidding each good-by. The men clapped him on the shoulder, and wished him a gruff Godspeed. He kissed the girls and women, and jested at the tears Albertse shed and the mournful expression of Eve's mother. He submitted to Maria's embraces, returning them lovingly. Before these spectators he took his sweetheart into his arms. Every one turned, with clumsy goodwill, from the sight. Neal smoothed back her hair, and kissed her forehead, her cheeks, her pretty chin, her lips. He was very grave now. He almost frightened Eve.

"The last word at night, and the first word in the morning," he murmured in her ear, "say over to yourself, 'He loves me,' and then you won't forget. Do you promise?"

"I promise — anything," she answered desperately. "Neal, don't leave me!" She suddenly clutched at his coat. "Don't go away! I cannot lose you! Give up everything. Nothing is worth this journey."

He shook off his own gloom to soothe her. "Nonsense," he laughed, but held her the closer, too, for the thought, "I am going to earn your blue and silver brocade."

He dared trust neither himself nor Eve for more of this. With a last merry glance into her woeful

face and one last kiss, he pulled away from her and ran down the bank to the boat. Eve began twenty sentences, without finishing one of them. She sank on the grass, hiding her tears in her hands.

"Come, Little Prince," Neal called to the slave, who was surrounded by his own companions, "the day is advancing. We have no more time to lose."

Maria thereupon stalked forward, leading her son by the hand. "Master Neal," she began, "we have been talking to this boy. He understands — his father and I have told him — he is to look after you, first and last, to tend you hand and foot. He is to bring my pretty master home again, or he is no child of mine."

Tears were running down Little Prince's cheeks. "I swore that for you, last night," said he. "On the Holy Evangelist of Almighty God I took the oath. And Master Neal knows I need not; he knows I would be true to him."

"As I to Little Prince," was the answer. "We could not forsake each other."

Maria caressed them both once more impartially. To her solace in that hard hour, she so contrived that the final farewell was not to Eve Verbeeck, but to her. Neal was about to step into the canoe, Little Prince having already pushed it off, when a slave made his way through the group and approached him. It was Pomp from the Pasture.

"The juffrouw Loveland sent this," said he, and pushed a packet into Neal's hand.

For an instant he thought, and was glad, that

Annetje had remembered him. On hearing Mary's name, he carelessly dropped the package into his pocket. The moment's delay was sufficient to send the boat a little further from land. The negro at his paddle, his back to the shore, did not realize Neal's predicament, while as for the youth, it was another feat of agility to display before those who had admired him throughout his life. He swung himself easily into the frail craft and sank upon the seat at the stern, a mutter of admiration deepening into a cheer. The applause followed him. He looked over his shoulder. The boys whom he had led were hurrahing. His father and Prince waved their hats. Eve stood crying against Albertse's shoulder. The other women shaded their eyes to watch the course of his boat. He felt an exultant thrill at the show he had made for them. The glory of triumph endured to soften that first awful moment in which the irrevocable step had been taken and he faced the consequences.

"Don't see them out of sight," cried Little Prince. "It is the worst sort of luck."

Neal paid no heed to this warning. He looked back so long as he could distinguish Eve among the rest. He noticed that she slowly separated from them, walking on along the bank. A fierce suspicion seized him. "I hope she will not meet Cecil Loveland!" and then he jeered at himself. How could he expect the girl to be shut away from admirers for all these months to come? He must give infinite trust to her, and that, he silently decided, he had every cause to feel.

If he had guessed Mary's counsel to her brother that morning, certainly his first fear of a meeting between Eve and the soldier might have been dispelled, and something greater than fear would have risen in its place. Miss Loveland followed Cecil to the stoop.

"Do you care for a woman's advice," she asked, "on the way to manage a woman? Don't go to the Fuyck to-day."

He stared at her, as he adjusted his cocked hat over his wig. "What under heaven do you mean?"

"For once, my dear, precisely what I say. Eve Verbeeck's heart will be occupied by her lover for some time yet to come. She will be swift to remember, now, every pledge of fidelity. Give her a week to find her loneliness beyond bearing, for the first thought of Neal to wear away and the second thought, of herself, to return. Then, and not before, take your consolation to Jonkheers Hill."

Cecil felt himself stiffen with surprise. He gaped stupidly at his sister. "You speak as if you wished me to marry the girl," said he.

Men are so downright.

"I wish you to be happy, Cecil," was Mary's gentle reply.

Still he regarded her, as if, she considered vexedly, he had never seen her till then. Finally he burst into a coarse laugh. "Neither would you object, possibly," he remarked, "to being happy yourself. What fools we are, we two! I could well-nigh forget that girl's poverty and low birth;

you would go even farther. You would lure away a boy" —

"We need not enter upon that," Mary interrupted, her cheeks burning, her fingers twitching nervously. "Since dangle about her you will, the only thing to consider is whether you make love well or badly; whether you are flouted a second time by that little provincial, or whether she comes at your call, — which shall it be?"

"You know," he growled sulkily.

"Then do as your sister says."

In pursuance of her own course of action at the time, Mary had not anticipated for her parting gift to Neal more welcome than he gave it then. Yet she guessed how, that night when camp was made in the heart of the woods, and he and his slave lay, in the firelight, side by side, home would be dearer than ever before, or ever afterwards. In his sick longing, as he gazed into the blackness about him and saw Eve everywhere, he remembered the last message from Albany and opened Mary's parcel. He read the two or three friendly sentences. He admired her accompanying present: a pair of moccasins for the times when he was wet or tired, and they stopped for the evening's rest, she told him. Nothing roused his wonder at the unsentimental gift. It brought pleasant memories of her which continued throughout many days when the extra shoes were worn. Mary builded no better than she knew, but her plan carried within its limits, for Eve and for Cornelis. Cecil scoffed at himself as her tool, and still was

ready for her work. Neal recalled her after a kindly fashion, and Eve — Eve said she was inconsolable.

Teunis Schemerhorn echoed the assertion. "It is good of you to invite her here so often," he praised his wife on one occasion. "At the best of times I never thought you were fond of the girl. I confess she is dreary company for any one nowadays."

"A loud sorrow cannot be long," quoth Albertse sententiously. "It will cry itself to sleep by and by. You may take my word for that."

"Then why," demanded Teunis, between the whiffs of smoke, "are you so sorry for Eve? I don't understand your reasoning."

"Evidently not," Albertse said, bustling about the room, "if you cannot see that what I do is from pity for Neal, not Eve."

After which speech she proceeded to raise such a commotion with her broom as drove her husband away before it.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT LITTLE PRINCE FOUND

"The battle is not always to the brave,
Nor life's sublimest wisdom to the wise:
True courage often is in frightened eyes."

"SHOULD we make as good time to-morrow as to-day," said Neal, "we may hope to reach Schenectady in twenty-four hours more."

Little Prince gave a grunt by way of answer. He was lifting with all his strength at one end of the canoe, during a long portage. He could not see how the young master contrived both to talk and work. Indeed, speech was becoming rarer between them, while the fellowship, grounded on their lifelong mutual love, engendered by the total dependence now upon each other developed to such perfection as human intercourse can seldom show. Through tedious days and weeks they must avoid the trail of the Canadian traders and seek out the smaller streams less known to the northerners. They skirted wide wastes of swamp-land, or lay, by night, gun at hand, close to the fire, and heard the wolf and the quackawarry in the woods that hemmed them in. Since they first shouldered their boat at Cohoes Falls, they had seen no other man. Safety was menaced in many directions. They were on so continued a strain that only an

absolutely natural existence such as theirs could have endured the test.

"I thank the Lord for one thing," Little Prince concluded to himself, — "we need not look to the north much longer. We have almost reached the limit."

He was rubbing his chafed shoulder, as they set down their load to rest, and it was his furtive, involuntary glance to the right hand which prompted this grateful reflection. He meant that, while they proceeded daily westward, the chain of Great Lakes finally formed a barrier to shut out the French and their savage allies. Foes must be feared during every step of a way which might reach so far as Mackinac. At least it must be a fight in the open, after the free road down from the St. Lawrence had been left behind.

"Did you see a shadow fall there between those hickory-trees?"

Neal's subdued voice was sharply questioning. He set his bundle of fagots on the ground, reaching out for his gun.

"I saw nothing," the slave replied, though he also snatched his musket. "Still, I was chopping, and had neither eyes nor ears for anything else. There is no shadow now."

Neal was aware of that. His gaze had not strayed from the spot he pointed out, and the sunny patch of grass remained untenanted. "We should not forget," he spoke with assurance, "that we are in the Mohawks' country. The chances are, any men we meet would be Hendrick's warriors and our friends."

"You think it was a man you saw; not a wolf, nor a bear, nor a bird in flight?"

Neal did not look at his companion while he answered. He was still watching the clearing between the hickory-trees. "I was either mistaken by some trick of light, and by our constant dread, or I saw a man's shadow fall across that place."

They waited thus, and the moments passed till an hour went by. "We must have our fire," Little Prince whispered at last, "for the beasts are a certain terror, while this was but suspicion. Were there spies near, they heard my axe and have had time to approach us. What say you, master? Will you guard and let me work?"

"Go on," was Neal's reply.

Soon the negro had raised a rampart of boughs, a rough blockade, to fence them in on all four sides. It was so good a camping-ground which they had chosen that they overlooked the one defect of peculiar openness. They could not, every night, sleep in their boat in midstream (that, from its discomforts, was a last resort), nor could they always find a natural fortification, or what might be so transformed. Within the breastwork of logs and underbrush they made their fire and broiled the fish they caught earlier in the day. It was dark by now. Neal could no longer watch.

The flames leaped up to the stars. From the surrounding forest there came the gleaming eyeballs of a wolf, the snarling cry of a wildcat. The men cared nothing for these visitors: they feared only their fellow man.

Morning dawned, and found them unmolested, after a night divided between the two into watches. They began to pack their belongings preparatory to a start. Neal saw a partridge rise, and shot it impulsively. They were careful to an extreme about overloading their boat, but fresh meat was a great temptation. The explosion woke an echo far away in the rocks. It did more than this.

"There, there," stammered Little Prince, springing to his master's side, "off to the southward! Look, quick! It was a man you saw."

For again a creeping figure made a dash from tree to tree. To their amazement they saw that it fled from them. They gazed at each other with a smile of relief.

"He is still more afraid than we," said Neal. "We are pursuers where we supposed ourselves pursued. Let us hasten on, Little Prince, before the fellow has changed his mind."

"Or found his friends," the slave remarked. "There may be boldness in numbers, and he can follow us."

"We should be at Schenectady by nightfall. A town means protection, remember. What it will be to sleep with both eyes closed once more!"

Little Prince repeated his master's longing sigh. It had been a weary while since they saw a roof above them, or food except that which they provided, day by day, to supplement the dried beef and Indian corn brought from home. The meeting, as well, with other men, kindly disposed and Christian, would be much in a desolation like that of

the wilderness. Such a training as this experience has no comparison. Those who suffered it were marked thereby for life. The giddy, foolhardy "boys" of Dutch provincial society returned from a trading-trip serious, considerate men. Their minds were broadened and deepened, their very appearance was changed. They resembled the natives in gait and gesture, in haughtiness of manner and of language.

The sun was setting as Neal and his negro arrived at the village of Schenectady, set like a jewel in a ring. Their long day had been without incident since the distant flight they witnessed in the gray before the dawn. After a night's rest at the trading-post, they took to the boat once more and paddled up the river. "If we make all speed," said Neal, "it is possible to be at Fort Hendrick before moonrise."

"Two nights of unbroken sleep," was the slave's comment. "Think, master, of all they will do for us!"

"I hope they will set you up," Neal answered, with an anxious glance to the stern, where the steersman sat. "You want more rest than you are getting. I have noticed it for some time."

"What of that?" cried Little Prince sharply. "Do you think I am giving out?"

There was so short a distance between master and boy, it so entirely faded out in intercourse like theirs, that Neal did not resent the tone of this inquiry. His desire was to evade it.

"Of what avail, except to frighten him into the

illness I would prevent," so his meditations ran, "if I point out to the good fellow how he starts and stares back to-day: how his wariness has grown to a frenzy, and he peers into every clump of bushes and behind each tree we pass. — What is it?" he demanded suddenly.

Little Prince forgot, in his excitement, that his own question remained unheeded. He had half risen from his seat. Now he sank back. "I fancied I saw another boat," he said. "It is gone by this, and I hear no sound of paddles."

Neal did not reply. If he could reach Fort Hendrick with this monomaniac, — he dared look, at present, no further than to that. Their directions were rather confused. They left the river too soon in search for the hill where the sachem's home was built. They were obliged to carry their boat along the high bank of a tributary stream, whose water was shallow though of rapid current. They glanced down at it, from the shelving rocks above, and asked each other if they might trust to it.

"This progress is so slow," Neal grumbled. "We cover the ground by inches, and no sign yet of the fort."

"Do you know," was Little Prince's reply, "I can't get the notion out of my head, — there seems a step keeping pace with mine just underneath my feet. It makes me nervous, master." He turned his black face to grin deprecatingly at Neal.

"An echo."

"Oh, no, not that. And why should my steps

be echoed on and on and never the sound of yours? Listen! Perhaps you can hear it, too."

Neal strained his ears, but, although only the boat's length away as it rested on their shoulders, he caught none other than the familiar forest noises.

"I mistrust," he suggested gently, "'t is not so much effect as cause. You imagine it makes you nervous when nervousness makes it all."

"I am not ill, if you mean that," was the indignant rejoinder. "And now — Why, where is the step? Why, where" —

The weight of the canoe fell all upon Little Prince. The stern crashed to the ground. He felt the bow slipping after it from his hold. What had happened to Master Neal? The negro looked back. Their boat lay balanced on the edge of the cliff. His comrade had disappeared. In the twilight, in the woods, he stood there utterly alone.

"Master Neal," he called, "where are you? Oh, master, answer me!"

The silence that pressed upon him was palpable as the dark. It was hideous, monstrous. He raised his voice again. A tree-toad croaked and mocked him. Like all his people, and nearer then, than now, by several generations, to savagery, Little Prince was wildly superstitious. His first impulse was to flee, — only to get away. His second consideration was imitative, and so equally a part of his race. He did what Neal would have done. With courage splendid as ever man has shown, the slave forced back his fright and began

his search. He crawled on hands and knees along the ground, reaching out for the body, his eyeballs protruding, his tongue hitting his teeth as he crept. What if he should find a corpse here in these awful woods?

He approached the rim of the rocky ledge where Neal had stood. His fingers, sensitive as all pioneers' became, felt, though he could not see, that earth had fallen away here, and recently the shelf must have broken. He lay on his breast and peered down to the surface of the stream. There were no trees to shut out the last daylight along the stony bank of the brook. He could discern something far below him. He believed it the figure of a man.

Little Prince threw himself over the precipice on to the next outcropping ledge. Here grew a stunted pine all awry. He used it to swing by farther along the bank. Thus plunging recklessly, or stealing from one protrusion to another, he arrived at the water-side. He ran to the body — it was a body — and fell across it passionately.

"Master Neal," he wailed, "you can't be dead? You would not die and leave me? That would not be like you."

No sound of reassurance came. He could feel that the heart he searched for beat still. That was all. Little Prince looked up to heaven: there seemed no help on earth.

A stone's throw away, at the head of the ravine, he saw the twinkle of lights. Fort Hendrick was very near. With a strength that comes solely

when, unconscious of our bodies, we give ourselves to a purpose, the negro took up the white man and staggered to his feet. He carried his burden forward, laboriously, step by step. He never set it down, for he feared to rest. The possibility lay in dogged perseverance. So he tugged at the inert form and pulled it over the ground, clasped to him, like a big baby which an older baby tends. At the foot of the slope where the building stood the slave gave his remaining strength to a mighty cry for aid. A door flew open. Voices answered him.

"What is wrong?" an Indian called.

"Here in the gully," Little Prince replied. "My master is hurt: a trader from Beverwyck. Help me bring him to the fort."

There was not a child, white nor black, in Albany, but had played with the natives lodging about the town, but had learned their ways and speech from them, and felt at home, as this negro felt, on hearing the Mohawk tongue. A score of men came readily to the rescue. From the threshold King Hendrick issued commands to those who ran forth at his bidding, and others who prepared a place for the reception of the injured man. Little Prince could not be induced to surrender his charge. His eyes were dazzled by entrance into the lighted house, but, unheeding the chief's profuse greetings, he followed the others to the bed made ready for Neal.

"I will bring you scaura," said one. "That will revive your master. Afterwards we can feed

him with broth. You see he begins to stir. Soon he will come to himself."

He went to the outer room for the liquor. Little Prince waved back the others. "I shall tend him myself," he muttered jealously. "Leave us two alone."

They crept away. He bent over the restless figure that tossed on its pile of furs. "What is it, Master Neal?" he questioned. "What can I do for you? Here am I, your slave."

The next moment he started back, his teeth chattering, his breath coming in a sob. This was not his Master Neal.

CHAPTER XII

AT THE CASTLE GATE

"And he set at all the brazen doors
A double guard. Yet who shall shut out Fate?"

EDWIN ARNOLD.

AT that instant Little Prince heard a stir outside the house. The voice which he felt would rouse him, were he dead, called lustily and he answered. He threw open a side door, plunging down into the night.

Neal was struggling up the hill. The slave seized him. He pulled him through the open doorway before several Indians, responsive to the cries, had quitted the main entrance.

"Master, what is this?"

"What is it? Why, that I saved myself, that 's all. My foot slipped on the cliff edge, and I fell halfway down the bank. When I could not get back, I spied Fort Hendrick's light and pushed on here. But, Little Prince," — as they entered the room where he could scrutinize his companion's features, — "has anything gone wrong? You look as if you saw a ghost."

The slave pointed towards the bed. He was shaking from head to foot. "Is it your double?" he asked. "I found it, and brought it here — for you."

Neal's superstitions, though lively, were not of so gross a type. He glanced eagerly at the figure, which now essayed to rise, and fell back as his servant had done at the sight. "How came the Black Gown at Fort Hendrick?"

"Where am I?" queried a tremulous voice in French.

Neal caught Little Prince by the arms, pushing him towards the mat that divided their room from the other. "Go to them at once," he directed, hearing the tramp of feet and the exchange of question and reply. "Say — say — your master's brother has joined him; that you rescued the one, and the other found his way hither alone. Go on."

Bewildered, but implicitly obedient, the negro disappeared around the flapping mat. Neal went over to the bedside.

"Where am I?" the priest repeated, gazing confusedly on his surroundings.

Neal knelt beside him and put his mouth to the Jesuit's ear. "You are with friends, — friends who will see that no harm befalls you, although we are in the house of the Mohawk chief."

The pale face became, at that, rigidly firm and defiant. Such a man, executing such a mission, always carried his life in his hand. The father had been tortured, before this, by savage captors. He was prepared for any fate which experience served to show him might impend. One of those priests who were hated, beyond all other Frenchmen, would fare, with the Mohawks, as a mouse in the paws of a cunning cat.

"Remember you have two friends with you," Neal answered that expression by reiterating.

Père Daubiny stared, for the first time, at the young man. "We have met before," he whispered.

"At the Pasture. And I carried you to the Idolater. So you have not forgotten?"

The other shook his head. "I have a good memory. Did you bring me here? My last recollection is of a noise from the cliff as I trudged along the bank. Something fell and startled me. I tripped, went down, and after that everything is a blank. What occurred then?"

Neal told him rapidly while he examined the man's hurts, happily not serious now that he was roused from his stupor. The Dutchman took off his own kerchief and knotted it into a cap that covered the tonsure. There remained no sign of the priest, both men appearing to be traders, clad alike in a semi-savage habit.

"I must allow Hendrick to visit you," he said, "but none need guess the truth. My slave has told them we are brothers."

"Twice you have been a brother to me," was the Jesuit's reply, with one hand on the dark head bent over his. "I pray God to repay you for it a thousand-fold into your bosom."

Neal made a grave reverence and, pulling the mat aside, went out to seek King Hendrick. In the middle of the larger room stood a powerful Indian, in full native dress, except that he wore a coat of light blue broadcloth heavily trimmed with

silver. A fine little boy, his son, was chasing a colt about the immense bare space, whose principal ornaments were a saddle, a cocked hat, and a pair of pistols suspended from the rafters. These had been the gifts of the king of England to the sachem. Neal offered deep obeisance before the chief, was welcomed, and his recital of Little Prince's story received with trustful acceptance.

"If such is your and his desire," said Hendrick, "we will leave the injured man to his rest. Yet I may attend him, first, and give him greeting?"

"He will be highly honored," Neal answered.

The slave was thoroughly mystified by it all. Yet schemes were no part of his duty, he thought. It remained for him to act upon his master's planning, and that he must be ready to do.

Neal led the sachem into Father Daubiny's presence. He stood beside the improvised couch while the tedious phrases loved of natives were interchanged. His heart beat crazily. His hand crept, in the shadow, towards his hunting-knife. What if Hendrick had seen and retained, in an Indian's tenacious memory, the marked features of the Jesuit priest? He waited for the guttural exclamation, an outcry to the followers. At length Hendrick raised himself and looked towards him.

"If I must lose you by daylight, and cannot persuade you to tarry with me, at least you will leave your brother behind? Let us nurse him to health."

Did he suspect?

"I trust," Neal answered steadily, "my brother

shall be so far recovered by this night's quiet and your kindness that he may accompany me on the morrow. Whatever befall, we cannot be separated. If I go, he goes. If he must stay, I stay with him."

He wondered if Hendrick wished to rid himself of his Dutch ally and then to work his vengeance on the Frenchman. He knew that at this juncture, while north and south watched each other, the Indians watched them both. On the other hand, he did not take into sufficient account how unlikely the chief would be to see a Jesuit in an Albany man's companion. His firmly delivered decision seemed to settle the matter. Hendrick soon left the bedside, although he dispatched thither liquor and a dish of food. Neal passed the evening with the chief, directing Little Prince to stand guard by the couch. He slept there, himself, that night.

At dawn they were astir. "You are sure you are fit to go?" Neal murmured to the priest.

"I am almost well again, this morning. Were it not so, I should feel, with you, that it is better to lie ill in the forest than to linger in this house. But I can make a respectable departure. There is no cause for surprise that I am determined to set out."

After a breakfast with the Indians, Hendrick insisted on accompanying them along the hill. He gave Neal some hints as to neighboring tribes where pelts might be obtained, and he oppressed the priest by the weight of his attentions. It

seemed a weary while before they were rid of him.

"The first thing," Neal observed, when their boat had been recovered and they were on their path to the river, "is, of course, to put a safe distance between Fort Hendrick and ourselves. Afterwards, father, where would you bend your steps?"

"I must return to La Presentation," was the answer. "But first, as you say, I will travel perhaps a day's journey with you. What is your next stop?"

Neal told him. He listened, a growing apprehension clouding his handsome face. "I came from that region yesterday," he said. "I was sent for by some of my children in the faith. Would you hear why they sent?"

"If you care to tell me."

"They were stricken with the pox."

Neal and Little Prince stood aghast in the way.

"They kept me with them till danger of my own illness was gone," the quiet voice went on. "They burned my garments and clad me in the clothes you see. I do not fear harm to you from contact with me. I do advise you to flee from that country and not to handle its furs."

"What was Hendrick's design, think you," Neal inquired, "in pointing the very region out to me?"

"Doubtless he has not yet learned of the sickness. It was confined to one settlement, and they are of my converts, not friendly to the Mohawks.

You might even go in safety among them. Yet you are aware how the plague spreads with the Indians?"

"It is a risk not to be taken," Neal concluded. "After all, Little Prince, we must push further on."

The brief hope that they should achieve their purpose so soon, and return to Albany that autumn, had grown dear in its fleeting moment. Both were grim and silent over the loss. Père Daubiny found them sorry companions to cheer a man on his way.

"May we meet under happier auspices," he said at parting. "And may it be granted me to repay what you have done for an enemy to your country and your faith."

The two men, so alike now that their dress was the same, smiled into each other's eyes. "We burghers have nothing to do with political disputes," Neal answered. "They are, first, his Majesty's, afterwards his government's here, and, finally, his officers'. We desire peace with you."

A Frenchman seldom had the opportunity to state his side of the case to the Dutch. The priest raised his brows with a slight smile. "New England might talk after that fashion," said he, "but it was your governor who instigated the Iroquois to attack Canada. You courted the consequences."

"I don't grant that we struck the first blow," Neal began irritably. In another instant both were laughing. "This is no time for argument," cried the Dutchman. "Let the soldiers settle all that. It is beyond you or me."

"I should be an ingrate," responded the Jesuit, "did I quarrel, by way of farewell, with so true a friend. Now, God be with you, my dear."

He kissed Neal on both cheeks, blessed Little Prince, and turned to go. In after years Neal sometimes tried to imagine what might have been the consequences, had the priest departed and said no further word. It was the younger man who called after him: —

"If you should visit the Pasture before I do, — it is improbable, in these war times, yet should you go, — remember me to the ladies, and tell them how I fared."

Père Daubiny retraced his steps. "It is improbable, indeed, unless an urgent summons reach me. In such event, I shall speak of you to my lady and Mademoiselle Annetje. I should not see the cousin." With that he hesitated. "My child, if, on the other hand, you return to Albany first, will you be the one to act as messenger?"

"To the Pasture?"

"To Lieutenant Loveland. Tell him his mother is at La Presentation."

Neal's attitude changed at once. "I will give Mademoiselle Mary this word from you," he said.

The Jesuit appeared still dissatisfied. "Her brother is the fit person to hear it. Their mother — she is not a good woman. She has long lived in open sin."

"I can tell neither such news," gasped Neal in horror. "Father, why should they know of it?"

The kindly priest seemed no less distressed. "I

fancied possibly, a son's influence" — he began, "and yet, I may be all wrong. I will talk to the abbé first. Meanwhile, do nothing yourself. You are right; there is nothing you can do."

This time he went away and did not come back. The white man and the black man traveled on to the west.

Three months passed, and found them facing towards the east once more. Neal had discovered valuable furs without penetrating the northern lands lying along the Great Lakes. Little Prince and he were jovial in their relief. They might now, did no accident occur and open weather favor them, reach the river ahead of the ice.

"I am as happy over my bargain as a child," said Neal one night in camp. "There has not been so fine a boatload brought to the Fuyck in years. The old wood-runners will envy me my luck."

"Suppose we open them," suggested Little Prince boyishly, "and have a look at our prize."

"I don't know," Neal answered in some doubt. "Could you bind all that pile into small compass again? They have made us a model bundle, and we can't spare an inch in the boat."

"I can stow furs away as well as any man," the slave assured him. "And I should like to handle them. It is a treat to see such pelts."

Thereupon he unwound the strings of rawhide and shook out the parcel's contents while Neal spread them on the ground. Silver fox and otter, beaver and bear skin, they made a rich showing. The young trapper beheld wealth here in his grasp.

"Eve shall have her blue and silver brocade," he thought. There lay their purchase without mar or blemish. It was perfect to the eye.

That night Little Prince persuaded him to sleep on a warm bed made of the furs. The forest's chill was increasing beyond the power of a fire to dispel, and the evening was clear; there was no sign of rain to fall on their precious goods. They might as well be used. So the slave rolled into the ashes, wrapped in both pairs of blankets, while his master lay on the luxurious bed, and dreamed of his sweetheart in Albany.

A fortnight later they arrived before the parapet of Johnson Castle. Some miles farther along the river, on its bank, was the Hall, occupied as a summer home by the commissary of New York, and surrounded by a community of farmers and traders. The Castle, always a storehouse, was a lodging-place for wayfarers, even if the family had not returned to it for cold weather.

"I pray there may be some one there," said Little Prince, as they climbed the hill. "Master, I don't like the look of you."

"I don't like the feeling of myself," Neal responded dryly. He did not refuse, as the slave had expected, an arm on which to lean. "I have pains in my back and legs, like an old, old man. I am burning up with fever. My heart throbs. See how thickly I speak. I don't quite know what I am saying. I — Is that the house, Little Prince? I wish you would carry me."

"I will lay you down here, where the pines

sing," the slave answered tenderly. "Then I will run, for a moment, away, and knock and ask for help. If any one is within, he may aid me, and I shall soon come back."

Neal paid no heed to this reassurance as he fell over upon the brown pine needles, where he lay, babbling of many things. He did not know who raised him up, nor how he was carried to shelter. He did not recognize the negro's among the faces that bent above his bed. Once he lifted himself on his elbow and cried: —

"Who said I had the pox? Then we must keep Eve from the room. Don't let her see me. Don't let her come near me. Don't let her catch the pox."

CHAPTER XIII

A STRING OF PEARLS

"The innocent Sultan Shah-Zaman
Has gone to the city Ispahan."

T. B. Aldrich.

While Neal, in his delirium, called upon Eve to flee from contagion, affairs at the Pasture were shaping themselves to be no less a factor in his future than was this illness itself.

One October afternoon, Mary accompanied her brother to the orchard that they might see the apple harvest. As they paced by themselves to and fro between the bending trees and watched the busy slaves heap up piles of red and yellow fruit, the woman spoke to Cecil. Her decision had been growing silently throughout the summer.

"Does Eve expect Cornelis to come home this month?"

"I do not know," sullenly. "She never mentions him."

"She is — kinder?"

With one of his many feminine tricks, Cecil tossed his head. "I have no reason to complain. But give me time!"

"You remember he told Annetje that he must wait until spring, if he did not reach the river before ice formed."

"Oh, I remember. The question is this, Mary: shall I precipitate matters, at once, to get my chance before he could come back, at the earliest date? Or shall I give myself more favor by risking his detention, and waiting a longer time?"

"Ask her now," said his sister.

"It is not six months since I offered her my buckles. Suppose she refuse them this time, also?"

"Then ask her again."

Cecil regarded his counselor with the admiration we are prone to feel for agreeable advice. "You mean, never to give her up?"

"Not while she remains a spinster. And I understand my sex, dear."

Perhaps she proved it by the action which followed. Loosening a string of beads from her throat, she held them out to him. "Take her these to-day, — if you go to-day."

"I go every day, now," he answered. "Nor, thanks to your wit, do I visit her empty handed. But your pearls! I hate to rob you of them."

He said this perfunctorily, tucking them, meanwhile, into his pocket. Heaven has been so kind to some women as to blind their sight to such incongruities. Mary was not blind. She appreciated the discrepancy between word and gesture, smiling sweetly, however, and murmuring: "I would give all I owned, to help you to your wish, Cecil."

It was wise to add to a store of gratitude. It seemed unnecessary to tell him those were mock

pearls, and worthless. "They are as good for his purpose; and good enough for that girl," she thought.

"Cecil," called Annetje's voice from a window, "will you come to the house? Cousin Anne would like to speak with you, if Mary does not mind."

"That means Mary is to remain where she is," said the woman, with a careless smile. "Do you suppose anything has gone wrong? What can my lady have to discuss with you in private?"

They turned to retrace their steps, Cecil answering both his sister's questions. "I suppose," he hazarded, "it is the everlasting subject of my marriage to Annetje. I have been surprised that she left me in peace so long."

Mary was likewise privately puzzled by the fact that a project, known to be close to the old Englishwoman's heart, should be allowed to sink into the background of late, while Cecil and his cousin showed daily how they drifted farther and farther from sentiment. She felt curious and alarmed, after a fashion, in regard to the interview.

For his part, Cecil was in a stubborn, hateful humor, — the wrath of a womanish man who smarts beneath injustice. When he entered the dining-room, and advanced to the fireplace, where Lady Anne was sitting, his attitude was that of a sulky lad who expects a flogging. Annetje had disappeared. "So it is about her," Cecil commented.

The bent figure in its armchair eyed his lower-

ing face with disapproval. The ivory-headed cane tapped impatiently upon the bricks. "Sit there," my lady directed, pointing with her stick to a chair across the hearth. "I wish to have a talk with you."

"I am ready," — Cecil dropped into the seat, — "although I guess what it concerns. You would reproach me, aunt, because Annetje and I postpone our wedding-day."

"No," she answered promptly. "On the contrary, I have been amazed at your discretion in leaving the girl alone. Now, Cecil, now, I think is the time to speak."

"I fail to understand you," the young man retorted sharply. "I asked her long ago — in May."

"Oh, then! She refused you, of course?"

"I fail to understand, either, why you should say, 'Of course.' Yes, she did refuse me."

My lady wagged her elaborate cap. "I thought as much. Ask her again."

The phrase brought with it a memory like a stab. Cecil's love for Eve, mingled with hate for Neal, was so ardent as to veil the ignominy of repeated petitions for a return of that affection. His indifference to Annetje flamed to dislike in this detestable duty, set up instead of the pleasure of wooing at the Fuyck. "A man does not repeat that sort of experience," he declaimed. "She made it plain how hateful I was to her. Why should I hear such insults again? I assure you I had enough in the once."

"Circumstances have changed," quoth my lady like an oracle. "Ask her again, I say."

At that Cecil leaped impetuously from his chair, his eyes flashing, his lips trembling with rage. "I will not," he cried vehemently. "I detest her! I detest the chit, and her high head and her supercilious airs. I would not marry Annetje, if she crawled on her knees to my feet, and begged of me to take her."

"Be silent!" My lady was glaring at him, her withered cheeks glowing with the hard, dull color of age. "How dare you defy me, Cecil? Have you forgotten" —

"I have forgotten nothing: that it was planned from our cradles; that her father's lands are wide, and she will be a rich woman; that it unites the Kierstiede grant with the Loveland patent. I forget nothing; and I tell you I will not do it. I tried once, to be rejected with scorn. You should reproach her, not me, because the scheme has fallen through."

The old lady hearkened to this high-pitched tirade with some compassion for the speaker. She called his aversion wounded pride, and sought to soothe it. "Annetje was beguiled by a passing fancy, when you spoke before," she explained. "She had been attracted — even my sight was not so dim but I saw — by that handsome young fellow, Cornelis Sleight."

Cecil lifted his hand and brought it down mercilessly on the stone chimney-corner. He looked at the blood oozing from the cut, as if it had been

Neal's. "Damn him! Damn him!" he screamed. "Is there no other man in the world?"

My lady shook her cane at him. "That will do. You may reserve your oaths for the barracks. The point to consider is this: will you offer yourself again to Annetje?"

"Why do you torment me?" He was almost whimpering. "When you know we dislike each other, cannot you give up this idea?"

Instead of answer, a strange silence followed. They heard the ashes fall on the hearth, and the sap ooze sputtering from the backlog. My lady fell back in her chair, leaning her head against its cushion. She was exhausted by such contention. She felt that she could bear no more. And so she remained passive. She let the matter drift on for a little longer. "There is time enough," she told herself. "By and by, I shall speak."

Cecil was rather alarmed at his own passion, when he saw its effect upon his aunt. He stared in remorseful awkwardness at the spent and weary figure. "Of course I wish to please you," he mumbled finally, after waiting in vain for her to reply. "But you must see that what you demand is impossible. I cannot marry the girl by force; and even you acknowledge she is in love with Cornelis Sleight."

"I did not acknowledge that," the thread of a voice insisted from the depths of the armchair. "I showed you why you failed before, — that one of a maid's many dreams stood in your way. She has not seen nor heard of him for months. She

has had time to forget what she was aware, from the first, was hopeless. This is your opportunity to catch her heart in the rebound."

Again Cecil recalled Mary's advice to the like effect, and he thought Lady Anne the most obstinately persistent of tyrants. "You have not told me yet," he objected, straightening himself to a haughty demeanor, "why I should try to catch a heart for which I confess to have no use. If I do not consider my uncle's wealth a sufficient bribe, you should scarcely insist upon it for me."

This speech was explicit, and a sore disappointment to my lady. "Oh, go," she muttered, shrinking into her pillows. "I cannot bring up all that story. I am too tired. Go away, Cecil. Some day, I will give you my reasons; not now. In the mean time, you can scarcely afford to despise your uncle's wealth, nor a good girl for a wife. Only I cannot tell you why, nor anything more at present."

He felt that this was true, and called her maid to her on leaving the room. He, too, was worn by the storm of that interview. He craved a balm to his bruised sensibility, and he sought Eve Verbeeck.

The girl's increasing value for him was enhanced when, on entering the low-browed room in Jonkheers Street, he found the widow its sole occupant. She said her daughter was drinking tea with Anna Janssen. Cecil had never bestowed one of his many gifts in the mother's presence. Eve had never displayed any of the collection to home criticism. She wore them in secret or in public, but

not once where Vrouw Verbeeck could notice and inquire whence they came. To-night, the young soldier had an inspiration, as he sat by the fire with his dull companion, and made talk and waited for Eve. He took the string of beads from his pocket, holding them out in his palm.

"Are they not pretty?" he observed. "They are my sister's pearls."

"Pretty?" the cracked voice echoed. "They are beauteous, to be sure."

"Widow Verbeeck, my wife may wear such jewels every day."

His intense manner affected her. She knew he referred to Eve: why, otherwise, did he come here so often? and she was vain of her resistance to the overture. "They will become some fine English lady," she answered. "They seem strange to us Dutch housewives."

"Why should they?"

The widow was no disputant. She was always positive, without full comprehension. "They would be out of keeping with us," she persisted, "except, of course, for a Cuyler, or a Van Cortlandt, or" —

Cecil pounced on the admission of her weak mind. "Where one Dutch woman can deck herself in finery, 't is proper for another. Should you not enjoy seeing Eve's beauty adorned by precious stones? I can dress her in silks as rich as those of madam at the mills. I can set her among the first families here, or in England. Mevrouw, would you not like to have her splendid and

admired, lady of a house like the Wendell or the Beekman place? Surely you are ambitious for your child."

"She is promised," was the stiff response. "Were she not" (Cecil took courage at that continuance, which showed the first objection not to be final), "I would see her dead and buried before she won such honors by wedding a regular."

"Why?"

"Because — because — You know what our poor dominie always said about the vices of soldiermen. And there is none of us Dutch, in our secret souls, but despises an Englishman."

"Why?"

"Because — You know why!"

"No, I do not. I wish you would tell me. I have heard that said often, of course, but never the reason why."

Cecil looked very small and forlorn, perched on a high chair in the chimney-corner. The widow was sorry for him, and her mood softened. She did not wish to speak harshly, nor could she seize upon the arguments she required. "For one thing," she announced triumphantly, "your king took away our province. The people resent that."

"'T was a hundred years ago. And I am not to blame." Cecil laughed drearily.

She grew sorrier and sorrier for him. He played with the pearls in his hand.

"Oh, of course not. No one of you is. Still, we cannot forget it. And your ways are not ours, nor your speech and manners. And you domineer.

And your fort is there, on the hill, all the time, pointing its guns at us. And the governor comes up from New York and ruffles it over our heads. Oh, we have reasons in plenty, only I am a poor speaker. I can't seem to make it plain."

She made something plain, — her sneaking pity for one of those conquerors. He who had played Dorinda was no mean actor. He sighed, gazing into the fire. "What is all my future," he mused aloud, "the Loveland patent, the position I shall occupy, and the gold to fling about, so long as I am a hated Englishman, who may not wed Eve Verbeeck?"

He brushed one hand across his eyes. In the other the pearls shone softly where the firelight fell on them. The widow moved to and fro on her bench, and dropped a stitch in her knitting. "It is hard," she acknowledged. "But you must not despond. There are pretty girls in plenty who would accept you, let alone what you can give. Such as you should have no trouble in picking out a wife."

Cecil fixed a reproachful glance upon her. "How can you, of all persons, say that to me? I do have trouble, that goes to my very heart. I shall marry: I must, for the sake of my name, and my fortune. Still, Eve is the one woman who could make me a happy man."

"And that is the truth?"

"Yes. That is the truth."

"Hist! Here she comes now. There is her step on the stoop." The widow had a guilty air,

as if surprised in a piece of mischief. "We shall say no more of this. Yet you must not give yourself to despair. That is sheer wickedness. And, maybe, some way will open to brighten the future for you."

"There is but one way," said Cecil.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER THE PINES

"Once for all a man must labor in utter absolute loneliness."

MANY visions came and went about Neal's sick-bed. One never changed. It was a black face bent above him, bright with devotion, or dulled with anxiety, but always patiently loving as— Neal himself could have compared it to nothing tenderer than the affection of the mother-slave. Sometimes a white man, stern, commanding, clad in semi-barbarous dress, attended him, too, and faithfully. Sometimes an Indian woman gave him drink, or brought him a cup of broth. Little Prince was present with these others: often he was alone.

As the patient lay, with closed eyes, partially unconscious of what took place around him, a voice, as if from a distance, said cheerfully: "His magnificent body is in his favor, and so are his good habits. Moreover, he has led a perfectly natural life for the past four months, and was in condition to resist this illness. It is going lightly with him, I trust."

"Shall he be scarred, think you?" Little Prince inquired. "I never supposed he would die. I knew he could not die. But I can't take him back

to my mammy with all his prettiness spoiled. She would not have it: she is that proud of him!"

"You need not fret," the first speaker answered. "There is little eruption on the face. I do not believe there will be noticeable marks. Please God, we shall save your master, and his beauty as well, for your mother."

Neal took some interest in this announcement, although rather as if it concerned another man. While he frankly rejoiced in his height, his strength, and his agility, their accompanying comeliness had invariably been treated as a matter of no moment. Now he realized that, for Eve no less than Maria, he wished to be fair to see. "Eve is so fond of pretty things," he thought, and directly across the reflection ran another: "I do not believe Annetje Kierstiede would care. Were she sorry, 't would be only for me, if I were ugly to look at."

The mention of Maria recalled to his confused brain the memory of their parting. When his nurse again raised him up to feed him, he smiled at the negro. "You have kept your oath, Little Prince," he said. "I shall tell mammy you tended me hand and foot."

The slave was radiant. "I love to tend you, Master Neal."

Neal stroked the hand close to his, weak tears clouding his eyes. "I know it. As I would love to wait on you."

Their fingers clasped before the thin, white hand fell on the coverlet. Neal had dropped asleep.

He was consistently unselfish, well or ill. He

implored his boy again and again to leave him, to rest, to think sometimes of himself. Till the second week — that perilous week — was passed, Little Prince put him off with excuses. It was on the fifteenth day of Neal's illness that the constant petition was answered. "Well, master, I will. I do feel rather tired."

For the first time in his life Neal heard those words in connection with service for himself. He was so prostrated that he could be no more than slightly surprised by them now. "That is right," he murmured. "Take care of your own health. I shall do well enough."

"I and my men are here," said Colonel Johnson's voice. "Yes, the good fellow is worn out. He must lie down, and we will look to you."

"Good by, dear Master Neal."

"Good by, dear Little Prince."

And then hours and hours succeeded of that monotonous death in life. Neal missed his comrade. He longed for him to come back. The many servants did not dispel his sense of desolation, yet he would not cut short the well-earned rest. He asked from time to time: "Does Little Prince continue well?"

Oftenest his host, and occasionally "Miss Molly," the Indian woman, sitting by his bed, answered the question, at first evasively. Afterwards their reply was invariable: "He is well, but he is asleep. You would not wake him, would you? He was very tired."

The loneliness increased until Neal sickened

from it, after his disease was gone. He could not gain strength while that desire for the old companionship pursued him constantly. He made no further progress towards recovery; his nurses were dismayed.

One day the woman drew Colonel Johnson aside for a long discussion. Neal felt not the faintest curiosity as to what was said. He lay on his pillow, his half-closed eyes bent on the door, watching it for sight of Little Prince. His ears received, without carrying further, the muttered conversation.

"It is the only thing to try," Miss Molly declared. "And he is such a fine young fellow. And you will be at hand. And all fear of contagion is gone."

"It is not that, nor dread of his influence on them. I suppose my hesitation lies in this, that I have never done such a thing before."

The soldier left the room. Neal saw him depart, and wondered if he were going to Little Prince. For himself, could he shake off that lethargy, and find where the slave lay sleeping; could he sit by him, and watch his slumbers, — that would be happiness. But he was so miserably alone!

There, the door was opening! Perhaps he was coming, now. Neal started up, his eyes widened, he stared at what he beheld. Colonel Johnson conducted towards him two quaint little figures, whose like Neal certainly had never seen. They were girls just entering womanhood, yet with so shy, so frightened a manner, that they seemed

wood-nymphs walking out of a fairy book. They were dressed alike in wrappers of chintz over green silk petticoats. Each stood enveloped in the rich waves of hair that fell, bound by a ribbon, to the hem of her gown. One carried a chess-board, the other held a large book under her arm.

Miss Molly had disappeared.

A slave fanning Neal on his pillow gaped stupidly at the apparition, nor could the invalid restrain his own surprise. Colonel Johnson, alone, was at his ease. "These are my daughters, Heer Sleight," he explained, "who live with their governess, and have come from their apartments to pay you a visit. I beg you to pardon their behavior. Except their brother and myself, you are the first white man they have ever seen." He spoke as usual, in Dutch, continuing: "I fear I must beg you to brush up your English for their benefit; that is, if they may stay."

The handsome invalid on the couch, appealing in his pallor, his weariness, and his unfailing sweetness of manner, smiled up at his guests. "Welcome," he said feebly. "You appear to brighten my solitude, and I cannot so much as rise to receive you. I shall have to urge your father to do the honors for me."

The pretty creatures fluttered and trembled, stealing sidelong glances at each other. Neither knew what to think of this stupendous adventure until she had heard her sister's opinion, albeit each had a feeling that it was all very agreeable. The romances of the seventeenth century, which they

read with their governess, were not of a type to rouse exalted affection. Still, this soft-voiced youth, with his great, sad eyes, and his mournful smile, appealed to the purest form of pity and kindliness. The slave placed chairs for them. They stationed themselves one on each side of the bed.

"Shall I read to you?" asked she who held the monstrous book.

"Or would you play chess with me?" the other inquired.

Their father leaned on the foot-board, regarding the trio keenly. Neal felt amused, a trifle annoyed, and handicapped by that scrutiny. "Our patient has scarcely the head for chess," the colonel observed. "We must reserve that for another day."

His daughters whirled about on their seats. "May we come another day?"

"I hope so," was the sedate reply. "If — if all goes well now, you shall repeat the experiment. Let us have a little reading. Perhaps mynheer might be edified by your book."

"I am sure I should," said Neal.

Nothing loath, the girl to his left hand opened her volume and began, in a sweet, low tone, with the first page of Rollin's "Ancient History." Before the chapter was finished, Neal had fallen asleep.

His visitors were gone when he awoke. Their father remained behind, and interpreted his look about the room. "They shall come again to-morrow, indeed this afternoon, if you are amused

by their society. I don't want them to tire you, nor — nor " —

He went back to the foot-board, taking up his position there once more. He was obviously nervous and somewhat constrained. His sentence trailed off into nothing, but his gaze rested still on Neal's.

The sick man smiled reassurance. " You don't want me to make love to them. I understand. Sir, if I would requite your goodness so cruelly, I should not know how to begin. I never made love save to one girl, and she is my promised wife."

Colonel Johnson surveyed him quizzically. " Now, I *am* afraid," he exclaimed. " Do you mean to tell me no girl save one ever fell in love with you? That is the point. I can trust you. Can I trust my daughters? "

Neal grew red and shamefaced. " Of course women like to talk," he said incoherently, " and sometimes Maria has imagined — she will have it that I must be to every one what I am to her. No! I never met the maid who would have looked at me except the very one I wanted: that seemed lucky, too."

" Particularly lucky."

Neal asked himself what joke had been perpetrated at which his host was laughing there all to himself.

However, the gentleman of the house was convinced that he might relinquish his strict guardianship. Whatever harm was done must be, he

perceived, not Neal's fault, but his own in introducing so attractive a companion to his innocent little girls. At the worst it could not be a bitter experience were either taught what love meant by this honest man and faithful suitor of another woman. Romance had, however, room wherein to expand. Winter was setting in. They perforce offered to shelter the wayfarer who had come to Johnson Castle and craved hospitality.

So the two sisters played their small round of games with Neal, chatted beside him over their embroidery, or read him to sleep with their books. He began to improve in health, to move from the bed to the settle, from that to stand upon his feet. Great was the girlish merriment when he essayed to walk, leaning on the slender shoulders for his crutch. He took his meals with Colonel Johnson, and was honored by frequent visits from the officer's widow who matronized those strangely reared young women. In all this time Little Prince did not appear. Hideous fears knocked at Neal's heart and could no longer be denied. He persevered in his set question each morning, with a petition that, if they were deceiving him, and his boy were ill, they should see for themselves that now he was sufficiently strong to go to the invalid, if not to minister in his turn. Master and men made the unvarying response: Little Prince was quite well, but tired by his weeks of watching. Neal could not see him as yet.

He refused to entertain the darkest suspicion, driving it fiercely away when it came, and again

and again. One must be very brave to willfully take that step which intervenes between blessed possibility and undoubted sorrow. Neal was a coward, in those days of physical languor. He dared not move. Yet such a state of uncertainty could not continue long. One December morning he was permitted to accompany the Misses Johnson and their governess on a daily walk. It was shortened for his sake, and, on the return, he found his strength so exhausted that he besought them to take another "short cut" through the woods.

To his astonishment they hesitated. The elder woman glanced distressfully towards her charges, who appeared to be appealing to her in turn. No one answered him. "If I interfere with your plans," Neal suggested, extremely perplexed, "pray allow me to turn back by myself. You need not go with me."

"It is not that," said the governess slowly; "and you stagger with fatigue. We must take you home without delay. You cannot stand here in the wind. We will all go by the shortest path. Young ladies, come with me."

She clasped Neal's arm to steady him. The girls walked on his other hand. In their curiously childish existence had entered small requirement for manœuvring and schemes. Their endeavors were so transparent that they drew the attention they sought to divert, as, presently, Neal saw them shielding something from his sight. He stared over the tops of their beaver bonnets.

There was a new-made grave in the pine woods. The brown needles were falling on it in the spot where, five weeks before, the slave had laid his master while he ran to the castle for help.

Neal stopped suddenly. He felt the hand tremble on his arm. He heard the girls whispering, with glances towards himself. He could not ask the question, yet he knew.

With a cry that thrilled their souls he flung himself on the mound. He did not speak, sobbing without the relief of tears. The women stood aghast, looking from him to one another, uncertain what to do.

"Say something to him," implored the older girl of her governess. "Comfort him, can you not? the way you comfort us."

"Not for the like grief," sighed the widow, and added in an aside: "Kneel down, you two, beside him, one on each side, and speak. Tell him his slave died happily, and did not suffer at all. Tell him how sorry you are. I think he will listen to you."

They obeyed her, as they always did, and obedience here was sweet. The little figures in their scarlet cloaks leaned over Neal and spoke. The governess saw him lift his head, at last, to answer and thank his pretty consolers.

"The young for the young," she mused. So she walked in silence behind them when, by and by, they went on their way to the castle.

CHAPTER XV

THE SACHEM'S PIPE

"We are never so visionary as to be prepared for what the next hour may bring forth." — THOREAU.

UNTIL the day when he came upon the grave underneath the pines, Neal had been on fire to set out for Albany. Now the longing died, and lay buried with Little Prince. Not that either the homesickness or the mourning was betrayed to those with him every day. After the first passionate outcry, where the boy in him awoke under the shock of surprise, he was sternly quiet and unobtrusive in his grief. However, his recovery was once more retarded. For several days he was confined to his room, and before he languidly took his old place in the family, the world about Johnson Castle was covered with snow and ice, huge drifts hedged in the house, and, through the pines, that melody was sung where each cone gave out to the wind its piano notes, a threnody to the slave who was tired, who was sleeping, and whom Neal could not awaken, nor see as yet.

That the castle was winter-bound for weeks to come made small difference to their guest. Colonel Johnson was grateful for his companionship during those dark, dull days, while he realized

that what was good for him was bad for the youth. Moreover, he feared its increasing influence on his children, and one morning in early March, he spoke. A summons had arrived for him from the south. "I must be setting out," said he, "so soon as the way opens, for this conference of the governors whom Braddock desires to meet. 'T will be a gathering full of interest, and fateful to the colonies. Would you were to go with me, lad!"

"My path lies in another direction," Neal observed cheerlessly. "Soon I must set out for home."

"To see Eve Verbeeck," the colonel reminded him, regarding in very kindly fashion the forlorn figure across the breakfast tray.

Neal threw his arms on the table, and buried his face in them. "To see my mammy," he exclaimed passionately. "It haunts me day and night. How can I go back to her alone?"

The older man left his seat, and came to stand by Neal. He placed one hand on the bent head. "Your presence will comfort those poor parents," he began, "and the knowledge that their child died gladly in your service."

Neal shivered. He caught at and strangled a sob. "How dare I go back," he cried out, "and say I left Little Prince behind? A thousand times I have wished I were the one who had been taken!"

"So that he might have borne this burden instead?"

The clearly stated question made Neal start, "I am hideously selfish," he said. "I see."

"And, Sleight, I must make another suggestion," Colonel Johnson went on, pursuing this opportunity of rousing the young fellow. "You could not remain here, with my daughters, when I leave the castle to join General Braddock. I am sending a party, soon, to the Fuyck, despite the frozen river. I confess I should wish you to accompany them. This I say, not as a host, for I shall miss my guest, but as a father, Neal."

Neal's pale face turned scarlet. "That is all nonsense," he said hurriedly, "although, of course, I will go."

"Nonsense enough, I grant you," was the woebegone answer, "yet as hard, for the time being, to those tender little hearts."

"If you prefer it, I will not see your daughters again," Neal offered rather haughtily. "And I swear that, so far, I have never uttered a word" —

"Oh, I understand. You cannot help it. Nor can they, poor dears. Possibly, though, it would be as well for you to busy yourself, these next few days, so that you have no time for embroideries, and shuttlecocks, and chess. The party sets out on Monday. Can you be ready?"

"I will be ready," Neal answered shortly.

This plain speaking did the good its originator hoped, in diverting the current of Neal's morbid thoughts, and in showing him that the plunge must be taken from this quiet monotony to the bitter days which awaited him at home. As is always the case, the casting his mind into its new mould was the hardest part. It soon took on the novel

shape, finding it as familiar as if it had known no other. Neal began to dream of Eve, to remember her pretty affectations, to call up in succession every charm and coquetry, to consider how he should evoke them. There was her cunning trick of dropping the head a trifle and glancing up underneath her lashes. It had set his heart in a flame a thousand times already. Soon would be the thousand and first.

He kept scrupulously aloof from the young girls during that intervening time, until, on the morning of his departure, he begged permission to bid them and the governess farewell.

"By all means," said Colonel Johnson. "My dear fellow, you have behaved admirably here. Do not fancy I overlook your self-restraint. 'T is no fault of yours that you are a handsome man, and the first man my little girls have seen. Nevertheless, I intend to be on hand when you say good-by to them."

Neal raised his brows, smiled sheepishly, and made no reply. At least it would be a relief to cut loose from this tangle which he dared not touch with his clumsy fingers. He was far from guessing that his host had foreseen such a state of mind when he threw himself and his children upon the young man's honor.

The governess did most of the talking during that final interview. On either side stood primly a pathetically proud figure shrouded in wavy hair, a sad face gazing out and up to Neal's dark eyes. He kissed the delicate fingers, while the observant

father noted an answering flush creep to his daughters' cheeks. The traveler made a set speech concerning the kindness shown him, the pleasant hours he had passed. The matron acknowledged this, her charges murmuring an inarticulate word or two. Then the men left them alone.

"Thank the Lord, that is over and done with," ejaculated the colonel, as they ran down the stairs.

Behind him Neal laughed ruefully. "It is what I was saying to myself. Dear little girls! You will be good to them? Although the whole thing is nonsensical, of course."

"Very nonsensical; and yet I shall be good."

After their intimate intercourse they parted on terms of increased respect, New York's Commissary for Indian Affairs and the unsuccessful trader. The native woman, through her stoic demeanor, betrayed some show of feeling on seeing the last of their visitor. To him it had become the shaking off one burden, even if another must be assumed. He went alone to the grave beneath the pines, and set out with the others, his face turned towards home.

Sentiment and sorrow were soon driven from his mind by the renewal of his old life in the woods, and the menace it presented. The party stood in no special danger either from the cold or from wild beasts. They understood how, by precaution and alertness, to ward off such evils. The Indians were the real source of harm. They must sojourn among them, day after day, not sure of their attitude, not convinced by friendly word nor deed that they could be trusted.

The impenetrable reserve of the natives, their power of deceit, was such as to outwit the civilized world for a century of intercourse. No one could trust them; no one could read them; no one could foresee, before the event, on any premises, what their action would be. Their judgments, their processes of thought, and their secretiveness were baffling always. In a crisis they loomed up as a terror from which the white man might flee, or against which he must fight. The Indians had become scornful of their weak allies, those who could neither help themselves against the French nor persuade the home government to render them effectual aid. They openly jeered at the frontiersmen left in the wilderness to contend against a wily foe, a mighty king, and that strength they regarded with superstitious horror, — the influence of the Jesuit priest. Neal and Colonel Johnson discussed the situation exhaustively, that winter, in the light of Braddock's appearance from England and the hostilities which must ensue. The men of Johnson's party were laborers from the settlement about the Hall. Neal had been given command, as most competent, except, it might be, in matters of woodcraft, and the colonel knew they should encounter men as well as nature on their way to Albany.

He directed them where to make their principal stops, so that they could travel in comparative comfort. For the first night Neal asked shelter in a lodge not far from the starting-point. The bark house was a black patch against the snow as the

white men approached. A score of savages, bearing torches, were climbing the hill on snowshoes, dragging after them the dark and rigid bodies of the wolves they had killed in their hunt. Deep-voiced cries of triumph were answered within the hut, whence another confused crowd of men issued, to see what had come. In the midst of this excitement Neal led his men forward.

They were warmly received so soon as the commissary's name was spoken. The Indians could render but a poor return for abundant hospitality from the castle. What they had, they freely gave, conducting the new arrivals, in their own noisy group, into the house. An old man sat by the fire, rolled in a buffalo-skin, apathetically awaiting the hunters. To him Neal was presented; "a friend of the white sachem," he had called himself.

A pair of dull black eyes looked up at him, out of the shriveled face, like — he thought idly — two dead coals whence the fire has gone. Then, in an instant, the fire sprang back to life. A spark flashed under the wrinkled lids, a weird, unearthly light crossed the withered features. It died out, and all was dark again. "My brother is welcome," said the old man.

Food was offered them, and space to spread their blankets about the fire that night. It was the utmost the Indians could give, and Neal's company received it gratefully, unsuspectingly. The young fellow paid no heed to that danger-signal of his reception, — the one flash that had called to him a warning. They went on, at daylight, to

another group of wigwams, where their old host recommended them to spend the following night. "One of my men shall guide you," he added. "I wish to send him thither."

"That is unnecessary." Miller Wyncoop, from the Hall, plucked Neal by the sleeve. "We don't want a filthy savage at our heels. And I can lead the way."

"Hush! Say no more," Neal ordered sternly, shocked by the ingratitude. "It goes without saying that we take the man."

So he informed his host. He fancied — and dismissed the fancy — that he saw again that quick gleam of purpose on the wizened face, that light that came and went, and was frightful in its passing. The party took up their journey. The Indian sped over the snow before them, bowed beneath a gift of fish he was bearing to his neighbors. During the long walk he never spoke, but often, that day, when Neal chanced to catch his eye, he detected a sly glance averted from him, and found he had been watched. He could not shake off the suspicion that this man was a spy.

At dusk they approached the native settlement. Wyncoop pointed out to Neal the clearing by the river. "I have been here a hundred times," he said. "As if we required a guide!"

"Or the savage company, for that matter," Neal returned, an uneasy feeling finding expression. "Yet I could not refuse him a place among our men. Only — keep him back. Don't allow him to go on alone, and give warning of our arrival."

"He has gone," replied the miller.

Neal clenched his fist, as if on a weapon. Directly afterwards he laughed at his own folly. "And why not?" he demanded of himself rather than his informant. "It is absurd to see anything underhand in this. We were well received last night. Doubtless we shall be, here. There is no cause to fear harm to us."

"None at all," Hans Wyncoop answered. Upon that he looked straight at Neal. "And yet I do. I advise you, as well, to fear it."

By this the entrance had been reached. A haughty figure stood there, prepared to greet them.

Everything went smoothly, the reception and the supper. Neal tried to catch Hans's gaze, as they all ate and drank together, to see what the other's conclusions were, and if his dread were not allayed. There were no signs here of anything amiss. The coarse, abundant meal was ended. Neal's host took up his calumet. He puffed at it for a little, then drew the stem from his mouth. Neal held out his hand.

It was his turn to smoke the pipe of peace. He smiled pleasantly into the red man's face, still extending his hand.

As he smiled, that face changed and became a livid fury. The Indian dropped the bowl to the floor. He leaned forward and spat on Neal.

"I do not smoke with the Black Gown," said he.

CHAPTER XVI

HOME

"The world has a million roosts for a man, but only one nest." — O. W. Holmes.

In that second the group were on their feet, red men and white together. By one impulse they sprang towards each other, like wolves at the throats of their kind. Neal alone kept his head, because he alone knew what the Indian meant. He grasped two of his followers by the arms. "Wait, wait," he panted. "Do nothing rash. Let me have speech with this savage."

The savage did not wait. "Seize the priest!" said he to his fellows, and a dozen forms leaped forward. "Bind him and his men, if they resist. We will make this night memorable to the Black Gown. And they shall stand by and see."

Once more Neal raised his voice above the tumult. To resist was to shed more blood, for they were outnumbered ten to one. He must restrain his men before they had struck the first useless and fatal blow. "Listen!" he cried, while the natives fell upon him. "I will be heard! I am not the Black Gown. Remember, I came here from Johnson Castle, the friend of Colonel Johnson."

He looked eagerly to see what was the effect of this insistence. Surely they understood that the priest would never have been entertained, as his followers could swear had happened to him, for the winter at the Castle.

The response was ready: "Doubtless you deceived the white sachem. He was not on the watch for a spy."

This, then, was the charge against Neal. He must suffer not alone as a Jesuit, but as a Frenchman caught reconnoitring in the enemy's country. His mind clutched desperately at one argument after another, and abandoned each. Of what avail to say, if he failed to prove, that he was not the man?

His companions were huddled together, regarding him with blanched faces. Neal shot one glance in their direction, and looked quickly away. Nothing gave him so vivid a sense of his fate as those white and shrinking men, like a group of girls, cowering in futile effort at courage, — courage to brave the spectacle of what he must endure. He shut his eyes and stood quite still. His brain seemed calling to him for something he could not give. Prove it! prove it! a part of him demanded, and the very need of haste acted as a paralysis. Only idle, ridiculous suggestions came to him. His mind floated away to irrelevant matters: what Père Daubiny had said at their parting, the tale of Cecil Loveland's mother, Eve, Annetje, his father — He brought himself back with a start.

The thick voice of the chief was issuing direc-

tions to Neal's captors. They were very explicit; indeed, they were already known from many a fireside talk at home, when Indian modes of torture had a vital interest for those who spoke of them. These men hesitated only because they would devise some trick whose fame should spread among the Canadians by reason of its wit. The sachem surveyed Neal, head on one side, as a painter might his canvas. Neal's ears were ringing, his heart pounded on his breast. But the hazel eyes did not falter. Pride may be oftenest a mean servant. Sometimes it is a lofty lord, whose righteous commandments we obey. The Indian had met that look before, one always worn by his own kind if torture threatened. It was trained into the savage from his birth, but it might come, without preparation or prayer, at the need of the white man who confronted a fate devised by perfect malignity. Life teaches one lesson well, — the royal art of endurance. The Indian raised his long fingers to Neal's face, stroking it downward from the beautiful eyes to the chin. "We shall make changes here," he mused. "We shall add and take away. He is too good to look at, this dear Black Gown from the north."

It was an impulse excited by the handsome features, and a desire to excel his own reputation on the spy. Neal reflected that, if the keen gaze could read beneath his calm seeming down into his spirit, they would leap for joy at the quivering coward they found. As on the night when he heard Little Prince lamenting the attraction his

illness might destroy, so now it came up before him a very goodly thing. And yet, if he had been scarred then, and his perfect beauty maimed, that would be little — nothing, in comparison with this! Neal told himself there was one form of suffering beyond his strength: to enter Eve Verbeeck's presence — she who loved pretty things — an object for abhorrence, or for mirth. He moved his arms in their lashings. He was powerless, but he should fight, fight till he was dead, before he gave himself up to these monsters to play with at their will.

The Indian drew his knife. "First, we must shave his head."

Those words were an inspiration. Something came clear and pertinent from out the mass of silly thoughts which fretted Neal. "I am not the Black Gown," he repeated. "The priest has a shaven crown."

The chief smiled contemptuously at this defense. "And so have you," he said. "Stoop down that I may see it."

He seized the tall figure roughly. Neal willingly fell on his knees. "Look," he cried eagerly, "my hair has been cut. It was never shaved."

Without doubt the cropped head both increased his resemblance to the Jesuit and confirmed the belief in their identity. The sachem stroked back the dead hair, falling out after Neal's illness, and the new hair beginning to grow. He glanced down. He bent over and looked again. His expression altered suddenly, curiously. He could find no trace of the tonsure. Truly this head had never

been shaven. He lifted a startled face to the circle surrounding him. "The man spoke truth."

"We have made a mistake?" some one inquired.

"Yes. He is not the priest."

A sulky murmur ran from one to another to find their fun was spoiled. The white men raised an exultant cheer.

"But it was a close squeeze," said Hans Wyncoop.

The natives loosened the thongs that bound their captive hand and foot. He staggered and threw himself on a pile of furs, the chief regarding him with a smile. "You were not afraid," he observed, "yet you look as if you had risen from a sick-bed."

"I was afraid," Neal returned his glance defiantly, "only I would not say so."

"It comes to the same thing," remarked the Indian. "Will you have a drink of water; or food? May we serve you in any way?"

"I wish to be left alone," was the answer.

That proved, as the chief had predicted, a memorable night to Neal. During its watches he lived over and over the misery of those moments. His character had been tested in many directions during the past eight months. This peculiar trial shook his soul. It painted his weaknesses, it illuminated his love for Eve and that she bore to him. He recognized her affection for the surface thing it was. There was only Maria, in all the world, to whom he could have gone, repulsive, fearful.

Or — was there only Maria? He averted his eyes, refusing to meet that other face which rose before him.

It was to this slave woman he must take the story of Little Prince. He shuddered as he remembered her love, and realized afresh what her grief would be. And now it was very near.

On the following morning their journey was resumed. Soon they reached the Cohoes Falls, and then one landmark after another was passed. They were treading familiar ground to Neal, sadly familiar on this home-coming. The last hour of all could be no longer delayed. It arrived when the mills appeared in sight and the Van Rensselaer manor. They were on the north road, proceeding steadily along the river. Immediately his father's house must show itself.

They passed the long, low buildings, whose terraced gables were so well known to Neal that he could have told the number of their bricks. He recognized the ship that rode at anchor as the Tyssen weather-vane, the lion at Lubert Van Bergen's, and the goose that swung over Garretje's roof. Now it was the third house at which he should stop; now the second; the first. He paused. His fellow-travelers would not tarry here. They were due elsewhere, and refused every invitation to linger. Neal must bear this sorrow — he called it his last sorrow — utterly alone.

He opened the gate and went in.

The house had an appearance for which he could not account. He set it down, broadly, to

a long absence, not noting, in masculine lack of detail, wherein the change consisted. There was a light in each window. This, of itself, was peculiar. The shutters were all thrown back, new curtains hung behind the glass, the stoop had been repainted.

"It seems gay," thought Neal.

He wondered if company could have come, and whence. His father and he had no other relations in the world. But hospitality was limitless, in those days, after a simple fashion. Neal concluded that the house was filled with guests. He could not meet Maria and Prince in the presence of another soul. His heart sprang up, like a wild thing struggling to be free; for he had stolen around the house to the kitchen. He lifted the latch.

Diana stood over the fire, stirring a kettle of suppawn. Prince sat at the far window, cleaning a harness. Neal's mammy was nowhere to be seen. Both negroes looked up at his entrance, dropping their work to stare.

"Bless the Lord, it 's my young master," cried the old woman.

Neal looked at the man. He raised his hand, and it fluttered nervously to his lips. "Where is Maria?" he asked.

"Master Neal! Is it you?"

"Yes, it is I, Prince. Where is Maria?"

The gray-haired slave and his young lord confronted each other. What was there in Neal's words to turn the black face ashen gray? Neither spoke again for a little time. Diana crept from

the room, and called to Maria in the entry. "Go to the kitchen," she said.

So Master Neal had learned the truth, she reflected, and came to his foster-mother. She was the one to console him. They must be alone.

Maria opened the door full on her husband. She followed his strained eyes.

"My pretty boy!" she cried.

Neal did not stir to meet her, when she ran across the room. "Wait," he gasped, stretching out his hands to Prince. "You hold her; you comfort her. I have sore news for you."

Before he finished, his nurse's arms were around him. She was sobbing on his breast. "It 's my own pretty boy," she wailed, "come back to bitter sorrow."

"Then you know?" Neal queried.

"We all know, Master Neal," said Prince gently. "We 're grieved in our hearts for you."

Was this why the old man had looked at him so compassionately? Did these patient, faithful parents feel, even in their loss, for him? Neal plucked a bit of courage out of his despair.

"I seem like a murderer, mammy," he whispered. "I hate myself that I should be the cause. And he was so good to me. Colonel Johnson said his last words were to tell his mother that he had kept the oath."

"Master Neal," called Prince hoarsely from across the room. "I don't understand! What do you mean?"

Maria drew herself back from him to stare up

into his face. Her voice was harsh and loud. "Where is Little Prince?"

He flung up his arms in agony. "I thought you said — I thought you knew."

Then they knew.

They were very considerate of him, gentle with his remorse, selfless and proud that their son had been true to his trust. It was a sweet mournfulness in which they talked together. By that prosaic touch wherewith the pathetic is saddened, Maria rendered the scene, after the first rare moments of quiet weeping, as bustling as her nature craved. She sent Prince to his polishing and herself flew to the bubbling porridge.

"There's no need of wringing one's hands," said she sadly, "while work's to be found to do. Go on, Master Neal. We can listen just as well. What then?"

The traveler continued his story, leaning against the chimney-jamb beside her, his soft voice faltering over the details, his whole being solaced by the homely surroundings, peace stealing, despite himself, back again to his soul. They were interrupted by the entrance of Neal's father.

He started as if he had seen a ghost. "You here?" he exclaimed.

That was in the shock of surprise. Afterwards he showed all the warmth of welcome that could be expected from so shy a man, trained in a school of reserve. And Neal was too distracted by the tidings he brought to be sensitive to other impressions. He answered old Pieter's questions,

went over again the harrowing part of his adventures, since this threw all others into the background, and so they quitted the kitchen. His father clung to him, hearkening inquisitively, and commenting, from time to time, by a click of his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

He, too, was wrapped up in this history of illness, the loss of Little Prince, and the failure of Neal's enterprise. They went into the dining-room, one not guessing, the other forgetting whom they should encounter.

Round the table was gathered a little group of women, sewing together. The bare mahogany boards and the floor about their feet were strewn with a rich and rustling stuff. Unconscious of the opening door, one seamstress threw down the tabby her dexterous fingers had been fashioning. She glanced up at the gray head across the table with that half-sly, half-merry lift of her eyelashes that Neal had seen a thousand times.

This was the thousand and first.

"At last," she meditated, "my wildest dream has come to pass. I shall wear a gown of blue and silver brocade."

"Eve!"

She fell over in her chair. All the women started up. Neal sprang into the confusion, and caught the girl in his arms.

"But I cannot understand," he stammered, even while he held her to him. "How do you come here? And your mother, — that is your mother! And what in the world is this?"

He pointed with his free hand towards the table. On it lay a gayly dressed doll. It was the sort of fashion-plate sent out to the colonies, and the first Neal had ever seen.

"Have you taken to playing with puppets again?" he asked.

His father answered him awkwardly enough. He cleared his throat, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"There have been changes here, in your absence," he said almost apologetically. "I should have prepared you for them, if your bad news had not put everything else out of my head. So, of course, you are astonished. Neal, Eve is your sister, now. The widow and I were married at Michaelmas, my lad."

CHAPTER XVII

"THE THIRD TIME OF ASKING"

"Let me, at least, be eaten by a lion."

NEAL glared at his father, his mind refusing to accept a statement never before presented to his wildest fancy.

"Let me tell him," cried Eve. Catching him by the sleeve, she plunged, forthwith, into a voluble story. He only knew that she talked and talked, apparently at random; that she questioned him without waiting for his replies; that she was agitated, unlike herself. Nor was this strange, on the night of her lover's return, without warning, without expectation, from the very gates of death.

Neal felt that he should give a part of his evening to Maria and Prince. Somewhat to his surprise, Eve readily agreed with him.

"We could not talk here in peace," she said aside, with a gesture indicating the other occupants of the room. "And I must put this sewing away, to set everything in order for to-morrow."

The finery thus presented to Neal brought up a bitter reflection. "Poor child," he commented, holding the latch in his hand, as he followed her comprehensive gaze, "while you were preparing your clothes for the wedding, I was losing all I

had in the world in those fatal furs. Can you wait, Eve? I must begin all over again."

The girl shivered. "It is horrible about the furs. Don't let us speak of that time."

He was prepared for this show of nervousness, and went out to the kitchen, glad to determine that the weary tale of his expedition should remain untold henceforth between himself and Eve. The slaves, however, required, and rightfully, every particular concerning Little Prince. The hours passed in such talk, which seemed so to comfort his mammy that Pieter Sleight came to announce bedtime before the young fellow had ended his story.

The following day was Sunday. Neal anticipated seeing in church the members of his company and receiving their congratulations on his return; that he came back empty handed would not abate the enthusiasm, he was confident, of any one of those ardent admirers to whom their leader could do no wrong. It was a warm, sweet sensation that flooded his heart, as he considered how Eve, also, received the news of his failure. She was grieved, he saw, although so brave, but her sorrow was entirely for him. "Such unselfishness is very lovely," thought Neal.

His plans were disarranged when, after breakfast, Heer and Vrouw Sleight began their preparations for church. "I am not going to-day," Eve announced abruptly; "I — I don't feel at all well." And in truth her eyes glowed feverishly, and her cheeks flamed. "Would you mind stay-

ing at home with me, Neal? We have not had a moment alone as yet."

His grave face was brightened by a fleeting, brilliant smile. "I scarcely need reminding of that fact. Certainly I will stay with you, although I am sorry for the cause. You look very ill, dear love."

Eve did not see the hand he stretched towards her. She was shyly reserved with Neal. It seemed as if his wooing must begin again from the very first.

"Come to the door," she said, now flitting away from him. "I want a breath of out-of-doors. I am choking for air this morning."

They went into the hall. The old couple were just leaving the house, although the dressing-bell had not long rung. Eve leaned through the open half of the entrance-door and called after them and Cæsar, bearing the vrouw's footstove and marching behind his mistress. She chaffed the negro, and gave her mother sharp directions to hold her striped skirt out of the mud and straighten her bonnet. Her tongue ran on and on. Neal watched the girl solicitously.

"She missed me sorely," he concluded, "if my coming affects her thus." Again a wave of tenderness surged up over his soul.

Presently he interrupted her idle monologue. "Who is that walking in this direction, instead of going to meeting? It 's an officer," said Neal.

A little scarlet figure shone out against the scattered dull brick houses and gaunt button-trees.

Eve looked where he pointed carelessly, for the man meant nothing at all to him. "I fancy — it may be — Lieutenant Loveland," she observed. Her voice held a shrill, quavering note. Neal felt that she was trembling within his arm.

"Why, child," he demanded, "what is wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing could be wrong."

"Is the lieutenant coming here?"

"I think so."

"And you fear I may be angry?"

He put his hand under her chin, lifting up her face.

"Yes, Neal."

The young man gave a short laugh of surprise. Those days of jealous wranglings, of delight in worsting the regular, were as far removed from him as his babyhood. He might no sooner put himself back into the one state than the other. He could not explain this to Eve, who understood little of what had happened to form his character since then, and sought, by other means, to convince her.

"I assure you," he protested, "I have the kindliest feeling for the poor fellow. I bear him no ill-will whatever."

He spoke incautiously in his earnestness. Eve, her gaze still intent on the gay little figure in the distance, exclaimed: "Poor fellow! What do you mean?"

Neal ground his teeth at the slip. "Did I say that? I don't know what I meant, I 'm sure."

"Now you are absurd," quoth her lips impa-

tiently. Her eyes remained steadfast. "There must be some reason for such a speech. You never called him 'poor fellow' before."

"I never knew before — Eve, see here!" Neal moved his arm to her shoulder, pulling her gently about to face him. "I am bound, on my honor, not to tell you what I meant. Don't ask me again. In justice to Loveland, though, I must say this: he has done nothing wrong."

"Then some one has," Eve persisted, a fretted frown between her brows. "Is it his sister?"

"No, not any one here. And that is all I will say."

She dropped her head and raised her eyes, looking up under their lashes. "Please, Nealie."

He smiled, but stood his ground. "Ah, no. You cannot coax this out of me. Nothing shall make me tell. That *is* Loveland, is n't it?" as the officer drew nearer.

"Yes."

"I think I won't see him, Eve. It is not anger, not a bit of it. But we are uncongenial to each other. You and he would be more at ease without me, and his society is disagreeable."

He was eager, in his haste and desire to convince her against her will. She appeared, however, content with the excuses offered. "Very well," she answered, fumbling for the bolt of the door. "In any event, our talk is spoiled. We must wait till this afternoon for a chance to be alone." She crossed the threshold and went out on to the stoop.

Meanwhile Neal fled through the dining-room to the side yard. That haven reached, he looked about him, rather at a loss. What should he do with himself?

The dead grass by the well was yellow and spongy. The garden lay behind it, a miry succession of mounds and excavations where the vegetables had been gathered. The fruit-trees were showing their first touch of leaf-buds, and not yet a glimpse of green. The sky was an alluring blue above him, but the earth wore one of its least attractive garments. He had no desire to walk abroad, and none of his friends would be available at that hour.

"I believe, after all, I will go to meeting," thought Neal.

He was not very late. The last bell was still pealing as he started for the village. He avoided Cecil by waiting in the garden until the soldier had entered the house. Thereupon he set out at a rapid pace, and soon was far along Handelaars Street. A few church-goers were ascending the steps to the sharp-roofed building as he hurried up to them. Neal took those steps at one bound, and strode in behind the others.

The room he entered was well lighted, its low walls pierced by windows on every side. These bore the arms of the Van Rensselaers, the Schuylers, Cuylers, and Van Cortlandts. Under a sky-blue ceiling ran the shallow gallery filled by women, and, in its turn, shading several rows of sidewise benches that faced the pews along the middle of

the church. A high and narrow pulpit stood at the farther end. Beyond it two stoves fronted each other, their long legs planted in certain of the pews. They were great iron boxes, with platform hearths, and so high as to be opened from the galleries. The Sleight sitting was underneath one of them. Often the boy had peered up at the black sheet over his curly head, and heard the clatter within its depths as some slave filled his mistress' footstove, and the dominie turned his glass for another hour at his sermon. He thought now, while he slipped into his place beside his father, of the old fear lest the stove might fall and crush the little fellow beneath, although, in these later days, he must stoop, to avoid hitting the hearth, until he had seated himself.

Every eye in the building rested, for a moment, upon Cornelis Sleight. He anticipated this. He read in the stolid countenances about him, the women lining the galleries, the men producing their pipes for a smoke, as heartfelt a greeting as if he were welcomed by a cheer. He caught Teunis's wandering gaze, and imagined it to be strangely sorrowful. He saw Albertse's face under her skimmer hat; that, too, was near to tears.

"They have heard of Little Prince," he said to himself.

He pulled his pipe from his pocket. He stuffed the bowl with tobacco, and took the coal his father offered. He was thus occupied when the dominie began to turn over his notices. Neal glanced up, indifferently, to hear. The old man read slowly,

uncertain alike of writing and of spectacles, which he paused, from time to time, to adjust.

"I publish the banns of marriage between George Cecil Loveland, of St. Olave's, England, and Eve Dirkse Verbeeck, of this parish. If any of you know cause or just impediment why these persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony, ye are to declare it. This is the third time of asking."

Neal touched the coal to his pipe. He drew a long whiff, settling into his seat. He felt absolutely nothing. As the first words of the familiar form ran into his sweetheart's name, he had a dazed sensation that this, like the blue and silver brocade at home, was in preparation for his own marriage. He listened to what followed, while his brain rejected the obvious meaning and substituted for it every sort of ridiculous reasoning. It was a confusion of Cecil with himself. It was a practical joke. It was a desperate device of his rival's. Last of all, it was the third time of asking, and Eve had thrown him over for this other man.

From that point he could think no further. He smoked his pipe and steadily regarded the dominie pounding on the pulpit cushion the long periods of his sermon. And he heard not one word that was said. His mind was as blank as a sheet of unused paper. Once or twice he told himself: "By and by I shall begin to suffer." As yet he had not recovered consciousness from the effects of the blow.

The congregation was dismissed.

Albertse leaned from the low rail of the gallery,

beckoning to her husband. They held a short conference, after which he came up to Neal. "My wife and I would be pleased," he said awkwardly, "if you choose to go with us. We want you to make our house your home, Neal, as long as ever you like."

"Thank you," Neal replied mechanically. "You are very kind."

With that he turned his back on his would-be host, striding after old Pieter. Vrouw Sleight stood in a group of women, gossiping over the wedding. Her husband was making his way to her when Neal laid a detaining hand upon him. "I want to speak to you."

"Well?" said his father.

"Will you tell me why I was left to find it out like — like that?"

The old man wheeled about and confronted his son, heedless of passers-by who peeped inquisitively into their faces.

"But Eve had prepared you?"

"Not by a syllable."

"She promised us she would. She insisted we must leave everything for her to explain. I was glad enough to have her do it. I could not have warned you, Nealie."

"No, perhaps not," was the quiet rejoinder. "Nor did Eve intend it to come upon me in this way. No doubt she meant to tell. Come here, father, where we shall be by ourselves. I want to know how long it is since this plot was hatched."

He pulled the old man one side till they were

out in Handelaars Street. They went away together, forgetting the vrouw and her friends.

"I could n't say," his father declared. "I heard the first hint of it two months ago. Then I fought the notion." He gazed piteously into the inscrutable face above him, while he hobbled at his utmost speed to keep up with his son. "Yet what can a man do, Nealie, against a pack of women-folks? I scolded, and it went right on. Her mother said it was one chance in a million for the girl. Eve's head was full of the gewgaws she should own. I began to see, the more I did see," with another of those beseeching glances, "that you were well rid of her. I hope you will tell her so, as soon as ever we reach home."

Neal pulled himself up suddenly. He passed one hand over his forehead. "That reminds me — What was it Teunis was talking about? I am bidden to Teunis's house. I cannot go home with you, father. That is not my home, where she is." He bit his lip to stay its quivering. "She has robbed me of everything: my future, and you, and my mammy, — everything at once."

CHAPTER XVIII

GROOM'S DAY

"These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
Among the heart-strings of a friend."
EDWARD ROWLAND SILL.

PIETER SLEIGHT was wounded through his paternal love by Neal's decision. Moreover, he was disappointed in his malicious expectation of a scene. He had not been strong enough to withstand Eve and her mother, but he rested his spirit upon the reflection that Neal would avenge himself.

"Are you going to give her up?" he questioned, "and never say a word?"

"What word could I say — now?"

"I don't understand you," the querulous voice went on. "You act so cool! Why, a year ago, you stormed like a madman over matters nothing like so bad as this."

"Yes, that is true," Neal conceded, in the same even, gentle manner. "A year ago I should have driven Eve out of her senses by my display of temper. It just is n't in me now, father. I can't."

So the bride, lingering on the stoop, after parting from her lover, saw old Pieter returning alone along the road from church. She ran down the path to meet him, forgetting her mother as com-

pletely as he had forgotten her, in their common interest.

"Do you know where Neal is?" she demanded. "I cannot find him anywhere."

"He has gone to Teunis Schemerhorn's," growled the old man, his chin sunk on his breast. "They asked him."

"Albertse! Then he has heard?"

One hand crept up to her heart.

"He was at meeting." Her stepfather rolled his eyes in her direction, deriving considerable comfort from what he beheld.

"At meeting?" Eve's voice rose to a shriek.

"That is what I said."

"Did he think — he never thought I meant him to find it out like that?"

"Just what he asked me," Pieter replied. "I told him how it was. And you need n't shake as if you had the ague. Neal does n't mind it much."

His toothless grin infuriated the girl beyond endurance. At least, she told herself it was the grin.

"I know better than that," she retorted in shrill contradiction. "He worships me. Of course he would mind. And I did intend to break it to him, and spare him all I could. You made that clear?"

"Yes; he said he was sure of it; nobody meant any harm. 'T was only at first that he thought otherwise."

"Then why has he gone to Albertse, instead of coming home?

"Because," snarled the miserable father, turning

on her savagely, "this is no home to him while you are under its roof. He said that, too."

"Yet you pretend he does not care!" cried Eve.

The old man searched his slow wits for words to clothe his convictions. "If you had seen him," he insisted, "you would understand what I mean. He was not angry. He acted — sickened at the very idea of you."

This was sufficiently clear. The girl urged him no further. Tossing her head, she flounced angrily up the brick pavement to the house. At the steps another notion came to her. She called over her shoulder: "He did not forbid the banns?"

Public disgrace would be hideous, and yet — something should have happened!

"That he did not," Neal's father assured her with a derisive cackle. "He went on smoking his pipe."

Eve flew across the stoop and banged the door behind her.

She could not believe, no matter what the spiteful Heer Sleight might say, that Neal, masterful, deeply loving, bred, from his cradle, to call her his possession, could let her slip thus from his grasp. She told herself, with a shudder, that he would come that night. He did not come, and in the morning she said this would be the day. Still that day, too, went by, and another night. Then she decided he would make a disturbance at her wedding.

Many guests were invited, among them officer friends of Cecil's, besides a few grand people

whom he or Mary knew, and some of the widow's old acquaintances. These and the great folk came, but not one of Eve's company. She expected their leader to the last. While she dressed in her bridal gown, she hearkened to every sound outside the door. Her heart beat fast, sending waves of rich color into her cheeks. Her eyes shone resplendent. She was a charming bride.

Cecil Loveland stifled his ambition. He forgot the companions of former days, to revel in the sight of her exquisite face and the realization that it belonged to him. Eve was answering the dominie, as they two stood before him; she was following the prayer and plighting her troth to this man, while she waited for an interruption which she felt must come. She waited, and watched, and heard every sound, but never the one she dreaded. And so Eve Verbeeck was married.

The next day brought with it certain customary functions. The bride's mother received and regaled her friends, while the groom kept open house, with a show of good things to eat, and such superfluity of drink as made the entertainment a scandal among the sedate of Albany. A dictator was always appointed, in which capacity Cecil asked Heer Maasen to preside at Lottridge's, where his acquaintances were supposed to seek him out. Indeed, any might attend, unbidden. Eve forced herself to fear Neal would push in here and quarrel with her husband. She dilated upon her impression, beseeching him not to pick up the gauntlet.

"He is easily silenced," was the off-hand re-

sponse. "If he does appear, it must be alone, for your boorish friends have given me the cut direct. And in a room full of soldiers, one fool to a score of swordsmen, I fancy, would fare but ill."

"Very true," Eve answered, absently rubbing her cheek as if to restore its color. "Very true; very true."

"What frets me most," Cecil continued in one of his confidential freaks, "is how I am to break this to Lady Anne. Mary said, yesterday, she does not suspect in the least."

"I thought possibly she might," Eve returned sharply (hers was not the pleasantest method of entering a family), "and that was the reason your cousin did not attend the wedding."

Cecil was kneeling by a pile of luggage, pulling it about. "Curse those boots," he muttered. "Where has the fellow put them? Oh, Annetje? No. She refused, because of the offense to our fascinating friend. Here they are at last! Saunders can contrive to hide a thing with more cunning" — His languid voice died out as he seated himself and began to pull on the boots.

Eve crossed over and stationed herself in front of him.

"Who is our fascinating friend?"

"The all-conquering Neal," said Cecil, with head bent over his task. "It appears my cousin at the Pasture has pinned her heart to his sleeve."

"I do not believe it."

"Perhaps not. And yet so it is." He sprang up and stamped his feet down into the boots.

"Every one was n't in love with Neal," Eve contended peevishly.

"Very nearly," returned Cecil, laughing. He drew her to him, kissing her lips. "All the more glory to me, eh? that I should get the best of this up-country Adonis."

"Oh, yes," she answered, and returned his kiss.

Mary had advised Cecil to hasten in acquainting Lady Anne with his bold move. So, at an earlier hour than he could be expected at the feast, he rode out to the Pasture. His sister awaited him on the stoop. She was pale and agitated. It is the decisive step which alarms a woman. She will urge a man up to it. She will go any lengths before it, herself. When that moment arrives, and action is to be taken, instant, irrevocable, then she becomes a coward, and the man fails to understand.

"I cannot see what is the matter," Cecil said, after they had exchanged a greeting. "You were always hurrying me on to this, yet you behave as if I had done it in spite of you."

"I know, I know. I did urge you. And there is nothing to fear since the patent is entailed. You shall be lord of Loveland manor at my lady's death, marry whom you may. Still, a family quarrel is horrid, and she has her English estates to leave where she pleases, remember. It is worth keeping friends with her. But you are your own master, nevertheless, and, after the thing is done, she must accept it. Only be gentle, Cecil."

"Yes, yes." He had heard this many times over. "Aunt Anne is in her rooms, I suppose?"

"Annetje is with her. I will call her to me. It is best for you to have a clear field from the first."

So he found my lady alone, lying on the stiff, straight-backed sofa, her ivory-topped cane where her hand could reach it, and a stand at her elbow holding medicines and fruit. For the past week, Lady Anne had been ill from a cold. Cecil went up to her, inquired regarding her condition, and lamented her hoarseness and languid manner. He clasped her hot little hand while he spoke. "Is there anything I can do?" he concluded.

"You may sit you down, and talk," the invalid croaked. "I am bored to death with Mary's efforts, and Annetje's, to enliven me. You have not been here for days."

"They were very busy days," said Cecil, rushing into the opening, in his longing to have the story out. "I never was so occupied in all my life before."

"Ah, that is probable. What do they say at the fort? Is it true that two expeditions are to start from the Fuyck so soon as the country opens? What is thought of General Braddock?"

"There is no doubt as to his plans," Cecil answered. "But then" —

"I am afraid for Beverwyck," the indistinct voice continued. "It is so weak. That dreadful old chief, who sneered at our defenses, a year ago, was right. What will become of us, if the French sweep down on us from the north?"

"My dear aunt," urged the soldier, "Albany is garrisoned. We are here to protect the town."

"You!" she repeated all too significantly. "A handful of boys to keep back Louis's armies and the savages of Canada!"

"Lady Anne Loveland, at least," Cecil resentfully answered, "should fear no evil from her fellow Papists."

His aunt nodded assent. "Yes, Father Daubiny would serve to spare my life, I trust. But there is Annetje, Cecil. This is no time for trifling. You and that girl should make your arrangements accordingly. You must marry."

He had been about to ask her what was implied in her allusion to personal safety, when his mind was swept on past this to the old consideration. He sprang impatiently to his feet.

"I gave you my answer months ago," he cried, "and once for all. I told you then that I did not see why I was the one tormented, while Annetje had been the one to blame."

"I have blamed her," said my lady quickly. "The difficulty is, she has nothing to gain by the match, so there is no hold on her. This morning I spoke of these fears of mine for the future, what she might face, with Barent on his death-bed, and she, a girl, in the path of a hostile army. It seemed to me she wavered. I am convinced this is your opportunity."

Cecil handed the invalid a cup of water to relieve her huskiness. He felt very sorry for the approaching disappointment.

"What did Annetje say?" he questioned, curious to learn.

"She said, 'Ask Cecil.'"

Then Annetje felt, with Mary, that this was the time to speak.

"Very well." His tone was thin and high, but perfectly calm. "Cecil says that it is too late for such schemes. He has taken to himself a wife."

My lady's pale face turned purple. The young man raised her on the pillows. "Was I too abrupt?" he inquired penitently.

"Abrupt! You lunatic! you maniac! I should say you were abrupt!"

"Aunt Anne, this is my own affair."

"So you went away and married another girl," she continued, stuttering, in her impatience, until, with her hoarseness, she was well-nigh beyond comprehension. "You could not wait to hear the reasons why I said you must wed Annetje."

"Those family reasons" — Cecil shrugged his shoulders. "I have listened to them again and again. They had no weight compared with one of Eve Verbeeck's smiles."

He considered this rather a lofty sentiment. My lady, however, caught up her cane. For an instant, he fancied she was about to lay it over his back, as she had often done in the past. But she came to herself, remembering this was no boyish transgression. It was a serious matter which they must confront.

"So your wife is the Widow Verbeeck's daughter?"

"Yes, aunt, and she *is* my wife. Remember that."

"I am not likely to forget. And now to test your memory in its turn. Have you any recollection of your mother?"

"You know!" His eyes flamed. "I shall not remain here to be insulted. Why do you mention my mother?"

"To account for the rest," said my lady, grown calm with the effort to speak. "You must hear it all now, at this late day. Cecil, we did not dream, up to the hour of your father's death, that he was a married man. In his last agony he told my husband of his family, — nothing more. William found you and Mary, and brought you home. Your mother he could not find. She had been my maid, once, and had run away with my jewels and a footman: her reasons were ample for hiding. You never guessed it was so bad as this, did you?"

"No; not so bad as this."

"George swore there was a marriage, and William treated you as his heir. Meanwhile he searched everywhere for your mother, that she might confirm the story, and point out the parish and the church register. George had been a wanderer, for years. William never could trace the proofs. We kept our doubts a secret, and went on looking. So" —

Cecil was breathing hard, as if he had been running. "Do you pretend to say," he demanded, "that I am not legitimate; not the heir to the Loveland patent?"

"I do not know. By the terms of the grant it

passes, after the death of your uncle and of myself, to his nearest of kin. You understand all that. If you are George Loveland's lawful heir, the phrase designates you clearly. If you are not, then the child of William's cousin is meant, — Annetje. You see why we planned this marriage. It made everything secure. And now " —

His face was ghastly as he echoed these words. " And now " —

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN THE ICE WENT OUT

"Time, that aged nurse,
Rock'd me to patience."
KEATS.

WHITE and shaking, Cecil rushed into Mary's presence, and flung his story at her like a blow. She cowered beneath it, crying out that he should be quiet. "I cannot bear it," she said.

"So I thought, yet I could," Cecil answered grimly, and went on with the narration.

"Hush!" Mary shrieked at her brother. "I tell you I cannot hear another word;" whereupon she immediately plied him with questions. "It all depends, our position and your prospects, upon the discovery of that woman? Aunt Anne believes there really was a marriage: that she could set everything straight?"

"Yes. Mary! It is hideous to hear you call her 'that woman'!"

"I hate her!" exclaimed his sister wildly. "I hate her! I hate her! I always knew she had deserted us. I never suspected she was — what she was. But we must find her, Cecil."

Instantly she remembered her brother's newly assumed responsibilities and her share in bringing

them upon him. She strove to excuse herself. "After all," she urged, "Annetje refused to marry you."

He seized upon her meaning. "Yes. That scheme for righting the wrong was out of the question. I do not blame you, Mary, nor regret my choice. Probably a man would be loath to say, within twenty-four hours of his wedding, that he was sorry for what he had done. By the way, I must go back to her. It is growing late."

He turned slowly, as if he were tired, to leave the room.

"Wait one moment. When shall we discuss this? We must concert some plan at once." Mary held her head between her hands, staring up at him.

"Of course. I shall come out again, soon, to see you. You forget that this is Groom's Day. They will be awaiting me at Lottridge's, impatient for the frolic to begin."

He laughed jeeringly, and was gone, — to hours of riot, of gayety, in which he was supposed to be the happiest of the revelers, when he could not speak of what filled his thoughts, nor ponder it, although it was insistently before him. After his guests' departure and his return to the rooms in the English tavern where his wife and he were staying, the subject of this disgrace and disappointment, long untouched, became a sensitive spot which he desired chiefly to conceal. He could not endure Eve's curious questions. He could not exhibit the family skeleton in its grisly horror. His dignity

rebelled, his affection for the girl protested against betrayal of the truth, — that what he knew had won her should so quickly be shown a mockery. Except in those furious outbursts of irresistible confidence, Cecil strove invariably to place the best side of himself in focus. To-night began his concealment of the worst part of his affairs. A generous allowance from his uncle's estate had been hitherto accepted as the just due of an heir. He could reckon upon that to give Eve the fripperies she coveted. She was not the sort to precipitate matters by pushing them, so long as she received her due from life.

Sunday morning brought the moment to which the girl, unconsciously, had been looking all her life. It was Bride's Sunday, when she should appear at church. Cecil proposed their attending the service at St. Peter's, but was answered by such dismay that he smiled and let her have her will. She was ready before the dressing-bell had ceased ringing, although she would not start for church until the second bell was silent.

"Why, I wish to be late," she replied to her husband's expostulations. "Every one must have a chance to study my gown and your fine clothes. Albertse was late, and so was Anna. You do not understand."

"Apparently not," said Cecil, much amused, nor did he dislike the pageantry for himself as another type of man would have done. Thus they went into church after the congregation was assembled. Neal, in his accustomed seat in the shade of the

great square stove, saw the entrance, — Eve seeking her mother, and Cecil finding a place among the men. The bride was exceedingly lovely, in a blue and silver frock over a hoop. Her husband's coat and breeches were of brocade of the same pattern. They looked like a pair of dolls, the two pretty little things, Neal thought, endeavoring to smile at the notion. But a hand was gripping his heart, and it hurt.

The blessed mental paralysis that accompanies a blow had disappeared. Each day of these seven since he learned to know Eve Verbeeck had been a struggle towards rearrangement of his life, towards a just view of the past no less than the future, simply to face a lot in which she bore no further share. Albertse comprehended what he was undergoing, and even Teunis guessed in part. Meanwhile, not a word was uttered on the one matter that occupied them all.

The deacons left their seats, beginning a tour of the church. Their little bags, suspended from slender rods, were borne from seat to seat, Cecil dropping a gold piece in, and enjoying the collector's start. Suddenly came a noise from out-of-doors. It resembled a prolonged peal of thunder. At the first crash every man sprang to his feet, the dominie gathering his gown about him, the deacons pausing in the aisle. "The ice!" A murmur ran from one to another. "The ice!" With that the church was empty.

When the congregation emerged upon Handelaars Street, it was to blend into a picture of

maddest hurry. Down Jonkheers Hill the soldiers were racing from the fort, the churchmen from St. Peter's. Out of each house slaves, masters, and children fled, bareheaded, wrapping themselves in the first garment they gathered up in passing. Doors were left open behind them. A man going to the well for water threw his pail by the roadside. Negroes flung away the baskets or the footstoves they should carry home. Bedridden men and screaming babies were borne on with the others. All joined in the stampede to the river. Within a quarter-hour there was not a human being in Albany outside that throng which collected in silence along the water-side. They had been looking forward to this morning's summons throughout the late warm days, while they still crossed the river in sledges, or skated in water ankle-deep. A great zigzag crack could be seen stretching up and down through the middle of the river. This was the fracture which had caused the first alarm. Again and again came that odd, tearing fury of sound. The ice was parting here and there, as the swollen waters underneath contended against the weight. It must give, and the boom was like nothing else in nature.

Another noise mingled with this as the northern floods came down. Streams fed by many snows burst their bounds, rushing headlong to the sea, sweeping everything before them, covering the lowlands, licking the highest banks. Uprooted trees rode on the boiling yellow tide, drowned livestock, and the shattered timbers of cabins and sheds.

Enormous cakes of ice crunched against each other, lifting themselves on end. The splitting roar as they parted, the grinding crash as they met, were repeated terribly. When the blocks were heaped in grotesque forms along the shore, or, across the Hudson, from bank to bank, were carried on by the freshet, under the soil of snow-ice, the sapphire masses gave back the light in rainbow colors, and sparkled as great jewels too dazzling for earthly eyes.

Hour after hour they stood, these citizens of Albany, who never missed seeing the ice go out, who watched always thus, awed and quiet, speaking seldom a word. Occasionally a child, or a negro like a child, would mutter the refrain that was an annual comment: —

"It is like the Day of Judgment."

Cecil waited by his wife for a time, interested and excited. Finally he grew tired. He had seen much the same thing last year. If war was declared, he bid fair to have further opportunities for many springs to come, and the event could not be to him what it was to Albany. By degrees he realized that he was uncomfortable: his brocaded coat was thinner than his uniform, and the air from the river was penetratingly cold.

"Shall we go now?" he asked.

"Oh, not yet!" she answered fervently. "Not for a long time yet!"

He waited a little. Then Ensign Hurst crossed over from a knot of officers to whisper with him.

"I think, if you do not mind, love," said Eve's husband, in the undertone all involuntarily adopted, "I shall return to the tavern for a while. You will find me there when you look for me. If you do not mind?"

"No," she said absently, her eyes fixed on the river. "Go by all means, Cecil, if you choose."

She heard his departing steps almost with a sense of relief. For it was not of the passing scene she was thinking, although its tumult chimed in with her mood. Natures like hers love the effective, however it is manifested. But Eve at that instant was dwelling upon the fact that Garretje had noticed her neighborhood by moving farther away, that Lubert did not return her nod, nor Catalina cast one glance of admiration on the blue and silver brocade. This was the price she paid for donning Cecil's finery. She considered her position worth whatever it cost, yet she resented their anger, and it grieved her. She regarded applause and smiles as her daily bread. She hated hatred with a coward's heart.

Eve knew, as she had known from the moment she entered his presence, where one tall figure showed above the others looking out now on the ice. She could scarcely recall a time when she had not been conscious of Neal Sleight's going and coming, and felt his presence, without the aid of sight. He did not notice her. The wind from the north was increasingly severe. It blew, laden with melting snows, to creep beneath their wraps and freeze the blood of the spectators, who shiv-

ered and shrunk before it, while reluctant to leave the shore. Eve stole noiselessly behind one group after another until she threaded her way unseen to where Neal stood alone. She stationed herself so that he must see her, should he move to go back to the village. She gave a little cough.

He drew his collar up about his ears and thrust his hands deeper into his pockets. Evidently he had no intention of stirring. She shifted her position until she faced the north. Her cardinal required fastening at the neck, or she fancied so. She was handling the cape as another gust enveloped her. It hurled her backward. It took her cloak on its wings, swinging it aloft. She felt herself flung against a sturdier form, and tried to regain her balance.

"Pardon me," she said in Dutch. "That was the gale's rudeness and not mine."

She glanced up at him.

Neal was shaking out her cloak. He handed it politely to her. "I pardon you, Mrs. Loveland," he answered. And he spoke in English.

"You?" she whispered.

They stood close together. He did not offer to assist her, although the long wrap dangled from the arms she could not raise. His eyes had been averted even when he called her by name. He refused to see that she needed him. "I must ask you" — Eve began at length. "Will you throw my cloak about me? See!"

He looked then. She was helpless in the teeth of the wind, her great cape flying out from her.

Neal took it gravely, wrapped her in its folds, and as she lifted her chin, stooped to fasten it at the throat. He had done that many and many a time.

While he inclined his head to see the clasp, Eve caught his gaze with hers. "Neal," she pleaded, "will you forgive me? Try."

"I am trying," said he.

"And don't think I was all bad. I was not, truly. It came by degrees. I cannot remember" —

"Nor have I any desire," said Neal, speaking in English, despite her efforts to use the Dutch, "to learn how it came about. I do not ask your motives. I ask nothing more of you, since you ceased to be Eve Verbeeck, save that you leave me to myself and do not speak to me again."

Eve's wide eyes had not left his face. They were striving to read its language. This was one they had never learned.

"I did not dream," she stammered in her bewilderment, "that you could take it — so! I thought you — would be angry, and then afterwards repent. I thought you might storm, but not that you should be so cold and hard. It is not like you, Neal."

"Not like the Neal you knew, I grant," he answered with a short laugh. "You imagined you had still to deal with a vehement lad whom, after all, you could wind around your finger. You failed to take into account" (he glanced again towards the river) "that in nature, and human nature, there may come a breaking up."

He walked away and left her.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE DEAD ROOM

"Much dearer be the things which come from hard distresse."
SPENSER.

"WHEN I go back to the wilderness"—Neal began.

Teunis glanced awkwardly across the canoe which they were beaching. As he stooped to gather up an armful of game, he patted the shoulder of the man whose determination planned another journey, hideous though the first had been, and in many forms, to him. Without hope to incite his action, comprehending what he must undergo, not yet recovered from the effects of former travel, Neal could anticipate, in the midst of their morning's sport, another such expedition.

Teunis felt his long-time reverence for his leader change to solicitude. With a quicker mind than Neal's, he had never, because of it, restrained his devotion to the head of their company. "I wish you would postpone your trip," said he. "There is work nearer home to do."

"How so?"

"Have you chanced to hear of Philip Schuyler's men?"

They started up the path to town, their load of

dead pigeons dangling from their arms. It was the springtime immigration of birds, and prodigious had been the slaughter.

"You are talking about the war?" Neal asked.

He could not make that war seem real to him; private interests and absence from home were to account for this. He had heard nothing of it since his conversations with Colonel Johnson, which were long ago pushed back in his mind.

"Of course I am. It is imminent, although both sides still call their operations measures of defense. Governor De Lancy's first commission was issued to Schuyler. He has enrolled a company of young men, Pedrom among them, and Lubert. Dirk enlisted afterwards, Jasper and I last night. I want you to join us, Neal."

"Very well," was the listless assent. Then Neal continued with more animation: "I am willing to do my duty, God knows, to the town and to the country. But I cannot take much interest in this war, Teunis. It seems to me a game between two kings across the water, and we colonists are the pawns they move about the board."

Teunis's broad face lightened with the reflection a slowly moving yet deliberative brain was evolving from events. "If we think that we play as their hands would move us, indeed," said he. "The regulars deem us puppets, and treat us with contempt. The officers tell more than they fancy, when wine is in them, and some high in authority are sadly given to wine. Through them we know that the ministry are determined to fight

their own battles in America; why, do you suppose?"

"I suppose nothing," Neal replied. Yet he was becoming excited.

"For fear we may grow to appreciate our strength. That is the reason. They acknowledge it among themselves."

Neal's eyes kindled. He began to speak, but Teunis was launched into the occasional garrulity of a reticent man. "All we need," said he, "is to realize the power in union, and to unite. I have studied on this, sitting by the fire, in the winter nights. England imagines we are restive, here in Rensselaerwyck, because we are Dutchmen who hate our dispossessors. Neal, it is n't that."

"Is n't it?" asked Neal. He really wished to know.

"We think so. We were brought up in the belief. And, as it chances, we are on the borderland between the two nations, where we must run from the French, or fight with the English. But the question is broader than appears. The south and the east are not Dutch, and, here in New Netherland, every country on earth has its representative. We are all alike concerned in the movement to stand alone. After the ministry have somewhat further restrained us, that they may mismanage this affair in our behalf, the colonies will come to see we are no chessmen for royal players. And then a nation shall be born."

Neal gazed transfixed by the radiance that touched those stolid features. It was love of

country, the most selfless love a man can know. "How does the French war relate to our independence?" he persisted. "Recollect this is new to me. You have had the time I lack in which to consider it."

Teunis shifted his game that he might free one hand. He tapped Neal impressively on the chest. "Do you remember the tale — 't was all a lie — Prince told to you and me, when we were youngsters, about a fisherman who found a bottle in the sea?"

"I had forgotten."

"He opened it and a genie escaped. The genie grew till he filled the heavens. There was no bottling him up again."

"Are we provincials to play his part?"

The notion pleased Neal. He had been baffled and beaten of late. It was sweet to entertain thoughts, once familiar, of successful effort and reward.

"Not we provincials. It is grander than that." The two men wheeled about and faced each other in their agitation. "It is we of New England and New Netherland. Braddock will not listen to Franklin and Washington, in the south. All depends upon the Acadian expedition and those against Niagara and Crown Point. If we can stand by ourselves and prove our power, then — then Franklin's schemes for federation may lead us where," he dropped his voice, "it shall be a victory over England no less than over France."

By this they had come in sight of Teunis's home,

where a man stood at the door. "We will talk of that another time," said he, hastening forward. "Meanwhile you join Philip Schuyler's company?"

"This very day."

The visitor was a man in black, a long band of crape wound round his hat. He bore an invitation. Barent Kierstiede was dead, and Neal was bidden to the funeral.

The young fellow was grieved to learn of this trouble befallen Annetje during the days he had passed, in heavy idleness, with his friends, while he avoided the Pasture because of its connection with Cecil Loveland. He understood that he must meet Eve's husband, if he obeyed the summons, but sympathy for the orphan, and some prickings of conscience over apparent neglect, set such considerations aside.

He went to the Bush, on the appointed day, in company with the dominie and a few of the older Dutchmen who remembered Heer Kierstiede before rheumatism (that plague of the province) so fiercely set upon him as to thrust him from active life. They were ushered into the main building of the house, its lofty rooms closed from spring sunshine by heavy shutters, and lighted by innumerable wax candles reflected in the polished surface of massive furniture. Everything here was plain, substantial, and costly. And, mused Cecil, his gaze roving about the room, Annetje owned it all. He shot a sly, inquiring glance towards Neal Sleight. Did the handsome boor realize how

splendid a prize was Cecil's cousin, and how easy to win?

He saw Cornelis tiptoe out into the hall, and guessed where he was going. Up the winding flight of stairs, over this south parlor, was what was called "the Dead Room," set apart for the awful exhibition of a corpse. Cecil shuddered, thinking it proved Neal's coarseness of fibre that curiosity should take him to stand beside that bier. Neal, on his part, had concluded Annetje would wish him to pay every respect to the dead man, and so he ascended the stairs.

A file of other guests was issuing from the room as he crossed the upper hall. He entered it alone. On the trestles stood the coffin, with burning candles at its head to light the gloom. Neal looked down at the rigid figure which he saw for the first time. Barent Kierstiede had been commonplace in life, but death is never commonplace. He was majestic as he lay, his closed eyes turned to heaven, his sunken face thrown backward. Neal knelt and said a prayer.

He caught a subdued rustle at the door, and sprang upright, abashed, as if he had been detected in a crime. It was Annetje, who faltered on the threshold. Her black dress gave her an air of piteous appeal. She was pale, her eyes showing traces of tears. Neal felt drawn to her by something stronger than the inherent tenderness of a man for an unhappy woman. They were both in trouble, and it wove a bond between them.

He took a step towards her.

"I did not imagine you were here," she stammered. "I supposed every one was gone. I came — to say good-by. You know!"

Her mouth was quivering, her eyes filled. Neal's heart leaped in sympathy and something that was almost joy. He was glad she felt he would understand. He gathered those fluttering fingers into his grasp, stroking them gently. "I will go away and leave you," he said. "Or," for he detected a slight gesture of dissent, "is there anything I could do?"

"Please stay here at the door."

So he guarded the entrance while Annetje disappeared into the room. Presently there came a tread along the passage. The pall-bearers were ready to carry their friend's coffin to the grave. Neal motioned them to wait upon the landing, then he entered the room. The girl was kneeling where he had knelt. He crossed to her side and touched the bowed head. "I fear you must come," he whispered, his tone like an embrace. "It is better you should go at once."

He walked back to the door with averted gaze. Almost immediately she followed him. Once outside, each paused, and then — Neal did not know how it happened — he held her hands again. "If I could comfort you, tell me," he murmured. "I am your cousin, remember."

"I do remember. I am going to ask you to help me, Neal."

His face brightened. "Can I, then? It is my utmost desire."

"Stay after the others have gone to-night, and ask to see me." She drew her hands from his. She whispered, "Thank you," and glided across the hall. A door opened, beyond which she disappeared.

Neal followed the coffin to the burial ground, in the procession of mourning men. No women were visible, nor was there funeral service of any kind. After the interment the party returned to the Pasture, Cecil officiating as master of the house and leading the way. Nothing less urgent than Annetje's request could force Neal to this position. To act as a guest of his rival, even though only in name, was a galling ordeal. But he was learning his lesson; he knew how to bear his fate. They went to the north parlor, where long tables sent up from their polished face the glitter of candles, the shine of silver and glass, tempting dishes, and innumerable preparations for drink. The men placed themselves about the room. Their plates and tankards were filled. Pipes passed about. All were ready for a feast and a revel.

Neal could not drink with Cecil Loveland, nor touch the food over which he presided. His glass remained empty. He accepted only a flat, round cake bearing the monogram B. K. This was not meant to be eaten, but to serve as a remembrance of the occasion, which it might seem insulting to Annetje to refuse. When the others were deep in liquor (a company of those days went very deep indeed), when Cecil's head was nodding, his gaze

foolish and fixed on nothing, Neal stole out of the room. He ordered a slave to summon his mistress. "She wished to see me," he added.

The negro appeared perplexed. "Mejuffrouw is with Lady Loveland," he began, "and my lady is very bad to-day. I am sure" — His countenance cleared. "This is Heer Sleight, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"I have a letter for you," drawing it from his pocket.

Neal had only twice in his life received written word from a woman. It set these ladies of the Pasture peculiarly apart that they knew how to write. Yet all Annetje said was this: "I cannot speak with you. Will you go to Mary, in the dining-room, and hold her in conversation while we convey the Black Gown out of the house? Mary suspects something."

He opened the west door from the summer parlor, crossed the porch, and raised the knocker of the dining-room. Mary answered it.

"Oh, Neal, you!" she exclaimed.

She drew him into the room, while he hastened to close the door. "I should not have come," he replied, "except at the juffrouw's wish. I was her guest, not your brother's. I hope he understands."

"So Annetje invited you?"

Neal was annoyed that she should harp on this. "May I sit with you, for a little?" he asked. "Now that I am here, it is good to see you again."

Mary was beaming. She flung herself into one

corner of the sofa, on a pile of cushions, and motioned him to a place beside her. "It is more than good to see you. And, Neal, you are not angry with me?"

Neal turned about to look sharply into her eyes. "Why should I be angry with you?"

"Because I am my brother's sister."

"That is not your fault," he said.

Mary gave him a glance that had dazzled many a man in its time. "If you could guess how my heart aches for you."

The broad shoulders squared themselves. Neal drew a little aloof. "You are very kind," he remarked, and she did not pursue the subject.

"I hear you have been ill" — she tried another tack — "out in that dreadful wilderness."

"Yes."

"And your negro boy" —

"How is Lady Anne?"

After this he sat by her and listened to her soft, sweet voice, it seemed to him for hours. With Mary the moments sped, and when darkness fell, it found her unaware. She thought Neal grown more silent than ever, yet she built fantastic hopes on his lingering and appearing glad to be with her. She felt her talk must amuse him, that he was entertained and brightened, and took pains to avoid any matter which should cause him again to wince. Still they belonged essentially to different worlds, she of the old, he of the new. Mary brought forward the subject of politics, rambling afield in the plans for the coming campaign. Neal

made an occasional cautious answer, with a vague conviction that no English gentlewoman could view this war as he had been induced to see it, accepting her good-natured praise for patronage, her confidence for boastfulness.

So the twilight found them, and he rose to go, — the Black Gown must be safely away by this.

"You will come to see me again?" urged Mary.

He stared at her for a moment, bewildered. Why, yes, — this was a visit to her. "If I may." And then, with a jerky utterance, "I have not thanked you — I could not — for your gift when I went to the west."

"Thanks are not necessary," said Mary in a low voice, "from one friend to another."

She rang for lights. "I would summon Annetje, were she not occupied with my aunt. For some reason my presence in the sick-room is not desired. But you will come another day? And then you shall see Annetje, too."

Her quick ear noted that he spoke very promptly in response. "I shall certainly come as often as I may."

When Pomp entered with candles, he found Miss Loveland alone. She leaned against the door, looking down at her right hand. She raised it suddenly and pressed it to her lips.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PASTURE'S BILLET

"To myself the blame that lookt so high."
SPENSER.

ONE day in early summer Major-General William Johnson, newly arrived at Albany, encountered Neal Sleight on the street. "And well met," he cried cordially, clasping the young man's hand. "You look the ideal of strength again, it rejoices me to see."

"I am well," was Neal's rejoinder. "And you? And the young ladies, your daughters?"

"In excellent health and spirits — now," said the father, with a little shrug and laugh. "You handsome rascal, never more do you visit me! — I mean at Johnson Castle. You shall come out to the Pasture, if you like, that we may discuss Braddock's follies together."

"Are you staying at the Pasture?" Neal inquired. "I was there yesterday, and they failed to mention it."

"I go to-day. Said they nothing of the billet? I am to be quartered upon them."

Neal's expression took on its old eagerness. "Could you arrange," he begged, "that I go there as well?"

"You? Why, man, you are married, are you not?"

"I shall never marry."

"Ah!" The general thrust his hand through the other's arm, turning, that they might stroll along together. "Don't frown at me like that, Sleight! These lovers' quarrels are made up sooner or later."

"Not if one of the lovers has become another man's wife."

"Is it possible?" His amusement changed to real concern. "I beg your pardon. I little suspected I should bruise so sore a spot. But to go back to your request: are you not then living with your father?"

"My father has married," said Neal doggedly, "albeit I have not. His second wife is the mother of the girl who jilted me. I ran the risk of meeting her, every day, while I stayed under that roof. For the present I am with dear friends, but my hostess is nursing a sickly brother, and, kind as they are, I feel myself in the way. 'T would oblige me vastly should I be quartered at the Pasture, and I do not believe," he concluded simply, "that the ladies could object. Better me than a stranger."

"Then you shall go," the general answered, more pitiful than if Neal's narrative had been delivered in less stoic fashion. "I can do that little for you, lad, and I will."

Upon the information that the Schemerhorn household was to lose its guest, Teunis, was loud

in his lamentations, but notwithstanding Albertse urged Neal to remain longer with them, she smiled to herself on hearing whither he was to depart.

He arrived at the Pasture, to be received by Mary Loveland, standing in the doorway of the summer parlor. "I thought you would not mind my coming," said Neal. "You, nor the juffrouw Kierstiede."

"I am overjoyed with our billet," Mary answered. "And Annetje does not mind."

Neal asked himself impatiently, unused as he was to self-analysis, why a chill crept over his pleasure. He pondered the matter while Mary seated him beside herself in the hall, where the Dutch doors at either end showed a soft light from the porches' shade without. He had been absurdly desirous of this visit, Neal considered, as Mary's chatter ran on, ever since its possibility appeared to him with General Johnson's announcement of his own lodgings. He had swept aside the truth that here he must encounter Cecil, no less surely than, at his father's house, he should see Eve. He allowed nothing to oppose him, because he longed to come. And he was greeted by the information that Annetje did not mind!

As often occurs, at that point in his reflections the name he dwelt upon fell from the lips of his companion.

"Annetje is showing her flower garden to General Johnson," said Mary.

Neal half rose from his chair. "I think I will join them, then."

"Do you" — doubtfully — "suppose that would be wise?"

She flashed a smile at him, whose significance he missed.

"Why not?"

"General Johnson is a widower?"

Neal thought of the Indian woman he had seen at the Castle, but he honestly had no notion she was the white sachem's wife. He said, "Yes."

"So I imagined. I was confident, when he spoke of his children, that they were motherless. It will not be for long."

Neal stood up, at this, before her. "Why will it not be for long?"

Mary went on shaking her head and laughing. "Would not my good cousin make an admirable stepmamma?"

"Nonsense!"

She grew suddenly grave as he. "The general appears to be attracted," she said, "and he is in a position to pursue his suit. His rank and wealth remove all doubt of his motives, though Annetje is morbid — I often tell her so — on the subject of fortune-hunters. You see she is very rich."

"Is she?" The frown returned to Neal's forehead. "I fancied it was your brother" —

Now it was Mary's turn to flinch. "My brother," she began smoothly, "is Lady Anne's heir to the Loveland patent. But Cousin Barent owned an enormous grant, which descends to his daughter." She lifted her hands in a charming gesture, throwing back the lace at her wrists and displaying the

round white arms to the elbow. "After all, I am content with my poverty. It makes a girl hard and suspicious to be rich. She positively dares not marry a poor man; at least, that is what Annetje says."

"How is Lady Anne?" Neal inquired.

By and by he heard steps upon the west porch. The heiress of the Pasture was approaching with General Johnson. He advanced to greet them, in the midst of one of Mary's coquettish speeches, before she had marked their coming. She saw that involuntary motion, and she was thankful she had alarmed him by the tales of Annetje's possessions and her pride.

The fact was, that Mary and Neal might serve as an allegory to stand for England and America. Nothing could make them understand each other. While Mary had conquered wiser men, bringing them, abject, to her feet, the wiles she used here recoiled on her, or worked as never before, with Neal. It was true he was startled by this novel aspect in which the juffrouw was presented to him. Still, it served to make him dream of her the more. She became unattainable, and thereby an object not so much of despair as of desire. Because to this feeling was coupled the sense that another man might win her, and the other man was at hand and ardent, so Annetje must, henceforth, bide forever in Neal's thoughts.

The girl had appealed to him, subtly and strongly, in the moment of their first meeting. His admiration was platonic, since his love for Eve formed so

essential a part of him that he no more regarded another woman with the fancy that she might be his wife than he selected another man whom he should prefer for a father. Such deep-laid impressions are hard to destroy. Yet, in man's adaptation to his environment, the short-lived dweller in a transitory world becomes accustomed to change with a suddenness that seems miraculous, although it is, rather, a law of nature. Neal was beginning to realize his freedom at the very time that Mary made her cousin so dear a woman before him.

The little party spent the June evening on the stoop, where Lady Anne joined them for a time. She kept Neal by her chair, that he might tell her those incidents of his late journey which he could be persuaded to relate; furthermore he must allay her fears — she had already questioned the general — concerning the safety of Albany, in the event of a French invasion. Mary hovered about the two. The commissioner talked in an undertone to Annetje on the steps. He appeared to be delighted with his hostess. Neal should have noticed it, he told himself, had Mary not insisted upon his attention to the fact. Finally my lady grew tired, announcing that she must return to her rooms.

"I will not have a negro," she retorted pettishly upon Annetje's proposition to call her nurse. "This young man shall lend me his arm, while you walk on the other side. That will do very well."

"And I can go behind," Mary said in her liveliest tones, "and carry your salts and fan."

"You shall do nothing of the sort. Remain

here with General Johnson until Annetje has come back."

Mary made a pretty grimace at Neal across her aunt's cap between them. She did not dare resist the household tyrant, and the trio departed together.

Annetje would have lingered with the invalid, to see her comfortable for the night, had not Lady Anne continued whimsically determined. She bade Neal ring for Dinah, and thereupon sent them both away. "I shall do, now," she declared. Her keen gaze watched the pair from her presence, a smile softening the glitter of her eyes. "After all," she muttered, — "after all, why not?"

The chamber they quitted was in the main building, opposite the Dead Room. As the young people passed that threshold, through the door ajar both caught a glimpse of something stirring within. It was long and white, and it fluttered eerily. Annetje gave a muffled shriek, shrinking like a child expecting a blow.

Neal came very close to her in the dusk. "It was a curtain," he announced, "caught in the draught from the hall, and blowing out with it."

The girl beat her foot against the floor. "How hideous!" she exclaimed in a horror-stricken voice. "Two months ago the sight of my father was a constant source of joy. I mourn him day and night, and yet, but now, when I fancied I saw his ghost, my first feeling was mad terror. Explain that to me, Neal."

Her retired and cultured life had given scope

for reflections altogether novel to him. She was far wiser than he in the realm of pure thought. Still he could not forego the opportunity, dear to every man, of informing a woman who accepted his decisions as final: "If it were your father, unchanged," he answered, "you would run, with the old delight, to meet him. It is that awful mystery of death that frightens us. I have the feeling in remembering Little Prince. I cannot imagine him a spirit in Paradise."

They reached the head of the stairs, where they paused. Neither made a motion to descend. "Tell me about Little Prince," said Annetje.

Neal had not once willingly mentioned his boy since the day he discovered that lonely grave underneath the pine-trees. Without in the least comprehending how it came to pass, he spoke freely, for one of his slow speech, to this girl, in the friendly gloom. He dwelt upon the devotion, the long service of the dear companion he had lost. She scarcely answered him. Nevertheless, he knew she cared, she sympathized with his sorrow, and they were at one.

"Annetje," came a clear voice from the summer parlor below. "Annetje, where are you? Is Aunt Anne taken ill?"

"No," Neal innocently responded. "Nothing is wrong with Lady Anne. We have but stopped to talk."

"Oh," said Mary. They heard the rustle of her gown as she moved across the hall.

Annetje gathered the folds of her own frock

into one hand before starting down the stairs. "Mary was perfectly well aware we were not with my lady," she muttered.

It was the first time Neal had listened to so peevish a tone from her. It served to bring this angel a step or two from her height, but then that carried her the nearer to himself. As he followed the black-robed figure, clattering along the shallow, bare steps, she whispered, over her shoulder, in further confidence, —

"I have neglected to thank you for what you did in aiding the Black Gown once more."

"I don't understand," said Neal in her ear.

He had been telling her of Little Prince's rescue of the priest, and the night at Hendrick's lodge. He fancied she referred to this.

"You remember — the day — the day you entertained Mary in the dining-room, while we hurried him out of the house?"

"Wait a moment, please." Neal stopped. "I should like to know about Father Daubiny. How came he to be so reckless? He assured me he should not venture here again unless you summoned him."

"He was summoned. Cousin Anne became very ill and alarmed. There was no priest nearer than her confessor, so he took the risk. That was how I had to call upon you to keep Mary amused and out of the way. She guessed there was a secret in the house."

Poor Neal! He was acquainted with Eve's teasing or coaxing humors. He possessed no ex-

perience by whose light to cope with such moods of women as confronted him here at the Pasture. He proceeded to use the words into which Annetje goaded him, while, in her heart, she was praying that he utter their opposite. "I earned no gratitude," he answered. "I enjoy your cousin's society. She is exceedingly kind to me."

"Oh, very well," said Annetje. She ran down the remaining steps, Neal coming slowly after her. He was disappointed at her sudden haste. They were so friendly and peaceful, there in the hall, by themselves.

There was an end to private conversation for those two that night. General Johnson was talking with Mary about the war, when they went out on the stoop. One British officer, he said, had written from Albany to another, "The provincials are averse to junction with the king's troops," and urged that they "have regulars at hand to secure the fools in case they should be repulsed" in the expeditions for which they were preparing.

"I suppose we Dutch are the fools," Neal observed. "They are not likely to speak thus of their own countrymen."

General Johnson addressed the women. "That is an ancient grievance of mine," said he, "against this obstinate fellow. Many a time, last winter, we discussed the situation, and I endeavored in vain to convince him that the provincials are all alike to England. Shall you never admit, Cornelis, that Great Britain holds the burghers of the

Fuyck as much — or as little — her own kindred as myself, or Israel Putnam, or John Stark, or" —

"Or me," cried Annetje, with a laugh. "I am sheer provincial, even if my mother was an Englishwoman."

"And mine, for the matter of that, was Scotch," Neal rejoined, pleased for some curious reason to find that they were in a way akin. Annetje always seemed — not English like Mary, yet assuredly not Dutch. "It is fine," he added enthusiastically, "to have you place yourself on our side."

Annetje's cheeks flushed, though it was too dark for any one to see. "That is where I belong," she insisted. "The time is ripe for the colonists to forget all other nationalities in the recollection that they are American."

"And anti-English," Mary continued. Neal caught her sigh.

His kindly nature was touched by the consideration of what they had made her endure. "Shall we stroll down to the gate?" he inquired, seeking a diversion. "It is almost time for the moon to rise."

He took it for granted that they should all go together. However, only Mary acknowledged his invitation, and on their return to the stoop they found Annetje had disappeared for the night. The general, smoking his pipe by himself, said he believed she had a headache.

CHAPTER XXII

LA PRESENTATION

"Good is as hundreds, evil as one:
Round about goeth the golden sun."

LEIGH HUNT.

IT was the feast of St. James the Apostle. The settlement of La Presentation (now Ogdensburg) lay in the woods, three Indian villages creeping up about the fort. Here were some half hundred pioneers, busy in the mills, the shops, and trading-houses. Abbé Picquet, at the colony's head, was the hardest worker there. For eighteen hours daily he wrought to support the undertaking by diligent physical toil. On this holiday he was in the log church; he and Père Daubiny and all their little world were there.

The rude building was decorated with paintings done by the priests, and representing Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. In the worshiping throng assembled alike Frenchmen and Indian converts. To the latter this service possessed the charm of novelty, and, fond of display as is the natural man, their dark eyes followed with awesome delight the winding procession, the thurifer swinging his censer, the cross-bearer attended by white-robed lads with glittering tapers, the long line of the

choir, whose dusky faces rose strangely above the snowy cottas, for these were savages who carried banners about the symbol of Redemption, and attended the priests in their advance to the altar.

There was a hush upon the village, a peace that lay over all the wilderness in whose heart La Presentation rose. The celebrant elevated the Host. The bell sounded, and warned the world without what moment had arrived. One old man, bowing in his corner by the door, followed the service with an abstraction which was not irreverent. His heart was here, his anxious mind was elsewhere. He gazed wistfully at the Black Gown, through the clouds of incense, his hand tapping its impatience upon the back of his chair. He pressed forward to receive the sacrament, and so soon as the procession had again, with hymn and flying banner, wound its course around the church, he left the building, taking up his position underneath the eaves, where he stood long as if on guard.

Father Daubiny was detained by one after another of his flock, who had a special word to say, or a special request to offer. At length he turned the corner. The old man caught sight of him.

"Ah, my good Pierre," cried the priest. "Thou art waiting for me?"

"Yes, father."

The Black Gown looked at him attentively. "Is it Toinette? Has she spoken?"

"Yes, father."

"She wishes to see me?"

"She sent for you." The withered features

were transformed: the dull eyes glowed. "At last, father, she is truly penitent. She sent for you."

"Toinette must be dying," the Black Gown concluded. From the experience of many years, he knew that it was more probably fear than regret which brought this sinner to the Church for peace.

He hastened to accompany Pierre Valot, expressing such sympathy as was applicable to the case, while they threaded their path between the groups of huts until they reached the one they sought. Pierre unlatched the door, holding it ajar for the priest to enter. Warm and bright as was this day in late July, every breath of air was excluded. The woman, lying under a pile of furs on her pallet, was cold with unearthly chill.

"Father, have you come?" the ghost of a voice inquired.

"Yes, dearest child. And I have brought the priest."

"But she is alone!" exclaimed the Black Gown, greatly shocked as he gazed about him.

"She would have it so," old Pierre muttered deprecatingly at his elbow. "She said our neighbors mocked her and pointed the finger. She made me swear I should permit none to see her now she has been brought so low. Have you taken your wine, my daughter?"

He stooped over the ghastly face on the bed. "Yes, yes," replied the woman impatiently. "I feel stronger. Let me see the father. Let me talk with him. Leave us alone together."

"You wish me to go away?" asked Pierre incredulously.

To the priest, standing by in silent patience, it was pathetic that the old man, recalling the sins of his child, could imagine he knew the worst: that there was no cause for her to shrink from his presence at her confession.

"Go away," the feeble voice repeated.

"Yes, Pierre," Father Daubiny added kindly. "Station thyself upon the doorstep. Then shalt thou be within call, in case of need, and yet Toinette may speak freely, as if to God alone."

"She could do that," persisted the peasant, with the obstinacy of ignorance, "were I to sit across the room. From thence I might watch, and did any change come" —

The Black Gown perceived that this simple soul dreaded death for his child as if her illness had been a matter of hours instead of weeks, and as if she were the best of daughters rather than the worst of women.

"Go away," she reiterated fretfully.

The priest led him one side, coaxing and soothing him. He no sooner saw the bent figure seated upon the steps, looking scrupulously away from the sick-room, than he approached the bed and knelt beside it. He began a prayer for the dying, but she could not wait for that.

"Listen," she interrupted, raising her transparent hand to stay his words. "My father has told you my story, has he not?"

"Yes, Toinette."

"I thought so. When you spoke to me, and more than once, I thought so. He did not tell you all, for he could not. I had a secret from him."

A gleam of triumph lighted her eyes. Père Daubiny understood there might be much of which old Pierre was ignorant in his daughter's life. He had lately learned of one matter wherein even such a woman might possess her pride. "A secret?" he echoed persuadingly.

The waxen features were touched by a smile. "He told you of my children, and how their father's family cared for them?"

"Yes, Toinette. Moreover, I have seen your son and daughter."

"You? Is it possible? I never heard that before."

She became so excited that the priest must calm her and administer a sip of wine, after which he answered a torrent of questions. He did not describe the position both Mary and Cecil had occupied upon that occasion of his one glimpse of them. He said nothing of their spying on their cousin. He pictured the woman's beauty, and spoke of Cecil's rank in the army, of their high social station.

She absorbed his speech breathlessly. "That is good! That is good!" she murmured. "I was sure they would be well treated. I did not know what a fine lady and gentleman they had grown to be."

Throughout the past three months, the Black

Gown had sought an interview with this woman, — since, in short, his visit to the Pasture, wherein Lady Anne's confession related more than her personal offenses. Toinette refused to see him, or to hearken if he forced himself into her presence. Protected by the blind love of her father, this was the first time the priest had been permitted to make his appeal. He went on, while her eyes still shone with the reflected glory of her children. "Think, then, Toinette, how great was your son's shame, on learning that he was not his father's heir, that he had no right to bear his father's name."

"Who told him that?"

"Lady Anne Loveland, his uncle's widow. Any proof to the contrary was in his mother's hold, and she refused to produce it."

"I did not refuse. George Loveland could tell. I thought he told."

"George Loveland was near his end before he spoke at all. Half his story died with him. On the strength of the other half, his brother reared the boy as if he were next of kin. Yet they had nothing save a dying man's bare statement to go upon."

Toinette fell to weeping. "How could I guess that?" she sobbed. "I left George to look after their rights; he was so proud of his babies! I had a copy of the register — I took that — and my ring. But I lost them, and then what good could I do by speaking? I never told even my father that I was George Loveland's wife."

"You say you lost the copy and the ring?"

There was incredulity in his tone. Toinette ceased her tears. Her eyes blazed and dried them up: "James Pierce stole my purse — I kept them in a purse — while I slept, once after we had been quarreling."

The Black Gown credited this assertion, Lady Anne having mentioned by name the servant who assisted Antoinette in robbing her mistress of her jewels. He had heard from Pierre that the two, after years of repeated separation and attachment (for they seemed always to care for each other), had endured a final parting at the man's death, when the woman came to her father.

"Did you ever recover them?" he asked eagerly.

"I found them on James's dead body. He hid them all those years. They were a hold over me, he said. And so they were."

"Why did you not tell your father at once when you secured your proof?" the priest insisted.

Toinette regarded him piteously. "I was afraid — I don't know — I was afraid he might send for Cecil. I can't have Cecil see me. But I always intended to leave them with you when I died. You see, I supposed this was my proof, not theirs, because they had George Loveland to make it plain to them."

He nodded encouragement. "Where are they now?"

She drew a package from beneath her pillow. "Here."

The Black Gown examined the scrap of paper

twisted about her ring. He crossed over to the window, reading it again.

"My child," he said, answering the hollow eyes that watched him wistfully, "I must carry this without delay to Albany. It means everything earthly to your son."

She trembled so that she shook the bed. "You will not bring him here? He need not see me?"

"No."

He came back and knelt once more beside her. After he had quieted the stricken creature, a prolonged whispered conversation took place, which had to do with other wrongs than those to her children. There was a lifetime for which to account. The pages were so soiled that the priest, used as he was to handling crime, sickened at turning them one by one.

This was a true penitent, he finally concluded, whatever motive might first have induced her confession. The past was abhorrent to her, the future a tremendous mystery. She clung to him with weak vehemence, beseeching that he should not leave her until the terrific last hour had struck. By and by he called old Pierre from his stolid watch in the doorway, and promising soon to return, went to the abbé for advice.

He said that Toinette had imparted a secret to him which forced his leaving the mission at once. "And yet," he added, "how can I forsake her while she looks to me as her stay? For the child is unfit to die."

The older man took snuff deliberately. "Wait

a little," he counseled. "She will not be long upon her road. Death is plainly in sight."

"You judge from her weakness?"

"I judge from this: she must have been on the threshold of the other world," the abbé answered with a sad smile, "before she would send for you."

"Yes," his colleague replied. "That was my first impression when Pierre called me this morning. Then I may wait."

The event proved their wisdom. Father Daubiny spent that night and the next and the next with old Pierre at the bed where the sick woman fought for each instant more of life. At last, in the early dawn of a summer day, she gave up, conquered. The fluttering breath died out.

Pierre Valot leaned over and closed her eyes. "'T is something to feel she is safe," he said, wagging his head, "if only she does not meet James Pierce again!"

The Black Gown tried to explain that James Pierce likewise was changed by this. He found it simpler to insist merely upon Antoinette's good behavior henceforth, thus solacing a father who knew the first confidence concerning his child since she was a baby girl. The priest left the house so soon as was possible, going to the abbé, under whose directions he prepared without further delay for his journey. He was to start that night.

The paper and the ring he sewed into his soutane's hem. He carried nothing else with him. He must beg his food as he went. A midnight sky was warm above him, sparkling with stars, and to

them the pine woods sent up their spicy odor. The Black Gown strode through the forest alone and unafraid. He passed from one friendly shelter to another, so long as the natives about him were those whom his zeal and the abbé's had made their converts. He understood that it was not here where danger lay. One so conspicuous in the Canadian-English difficulties as Father Picquet naturally involved his associates in his own peril. The Black Gown appreciated the risks he ran in conveying that paper to Albany. But the war might last for years, while a wronged man was kept in the wrong. He had quoted to his superior Pompey's speech in setting out on that voyage of political duty: "It is necessary that I go. It is not necessary that I live."

Nor could the older man find it in his heart to dissuade him. The deed was dared in behalf of a foe to their religion and their native land: this much he gathered from Père Daubiny's meagre statement. It remained unquestioned right, and so it must be done. Afterwards he was glad to recall those fine words of the heathen, said in the time of their parting. Pompey's farewell remained the valedictory of the Black Gown.

CHAPTER XXIII

HIS WEDDED WIFE

"Our own conscience is the point of departure. We reason from ourselves to man, never from man to us." — BALZAC.

"I DON'T see," Eve fretted, "why you are always going out to the Pasture."

She stood before her mirror, powdering the elaborate structure that crowned her head. Eve was altogether the English lady, in these days, with pointed bodice, hoop, and pompadour. Both arms were raised, pinning a string of pearls among the waving locks. She tossed the complaint at her husband over her shoulder.

"I have business matters upon which to consult Mary," said Cecil shortly. He crossed the room to his desk, where he began rummaging among his papers. Eve saw that she had but a small part of his attention, and this increased her anger.

"I never go anywhere," she complained. "I might as well be dressed in duffel. There is nobody except mother to notice my pretty clothes."

"Is that my fault?" Cecil retorted, still abstractedly. "You have lived in Albany all your life. Pray, where are your friends?"

"You know. They threw me over when I

married. And you will not bring your acquaintances here. I suppose you are ashamed of me."

At that Cecil turned on her, his delicate features working with passion. "I have explained all this to you again and again," said he. "There is scarcely a man at the fort whom I should wish my wife to meet. You are aware of the regulars' reputation; don't treat me as if I were a Bluebeard. As for the Pasture, I did not imagine you cared to push into Neal Sleight's presence. Not," he continued, giving his effeminate, spiteful titter, "that the fellow would notice you. Mary occupies his attention."

The string of pearls shook in the hands that held it. Eve elevated her chin disdainfully. As if she did not know Neal!

"You are mighty considerate of me," she sneered. "How is it you have no such delicacy in seeing him yourself?"

This was the farthest either of the young couple had ever gone on the road to a quarrel. Eve's love of beauty, no longer satisfied by Cecil's personality as in Neal's physical perfection, was appeased by the setting in which her husband placed her, and by the courtly manner of his devotion. Her Dutch lover had been good to her, — she knew now how good, — but he was unskilled in the graces, the small attentions, Cecil showered upon her. These were passing sweet to her soul. She had never seen the expression that, in this instant, confronted her. She certainly had never heard the horrible blasphemy that poured from her hus-

band's lips at the recollection her pert question evoked.

"Curse him! curse him! curse him!" Cecil yelled at last. "The insolent fool sits at my cousin's board, and treats me — me, forsooth! — to a show of his lofty indifference, as if he were King George and I a negro slave. Do you fancy I should put myself in danger of his presumption, were it not that I must see Mary, and it is best I see my aunt?"

Eve did not hear most of this conclusion, for her hands were covering her ears. "You foul-mouthed wretch!" she screamed in bourgeois rage. "How dare you insult me? How dare you use such language to your wife?"

By this time Cecil was thoroughly ashamed. "I said more than I intended," he mumbled sulkily. "There is only one man in the world who could rouse me to it. And doubtless," with an evil sneer, "for all his high looks when we meet, you might learn much the same things of me from him, did he open his heart to you as of old."

"You flatter yourself," scolded Eve. "If he were capable of such vile epithets, — and he could no more use them than I, — they would not be at your expense. He called you 'poor fellow.' He called you so to me."

The memory came to her on the inspiration of sheer hatefulness. It served a twofold purpose of wounding Cecil and gratifying her own curiosity. The first office was completely performed. Her husband sprang at her, clutching her by the

wrists. "What is that? Don't stand there smirking at me! How dare Neal Sleight call me poor fellow?"

"Oh, Neal dare do anything," Eve answered glibly. "And I am sure I don't know what he meant."

"When did he say it? How came the whole thing about?"

"I asked him — 't was before he heard of my wedding — if he did not dislike you, and he answered, 'No, poor fellow.' He said some one belonging to you had done wrong; he was sorry you had such shame to bear. Who was it, Cecil?"

Her fury had lashed her on to a position she could not have taken in cold blood. As it was, the dreadful sentences quavered in their fall. Cecil's jaw dropped; his cheek grew white.

"Whom did he mean?" his wife repeated.

"He meant my mother."

"Your mother? How could that be? I thought your parents were dead."

Cecil whirled on his heel. "No matter what you thought. Where is Saunders? I must have a horse saddled. I must go out to the Pasture without a moment's delay."

"What did he mean about your mother?"

Cecil tugged at the bell-rope. Eve ran up to him, seizing his arm. "You shall not leave this room till you tell me. What did he mean about your mother?"

He told her — fully.

When his voice ceased, husband and wife looked

from one ghastly face to the other. "You think Neal knows where she is to be found?"

"Cannot you see for yourself that he does? I shall go to the Bush. I shall talk with Mary. I shall talk with him" —

"You need not expect that," said Eve. "He won't listen to you."

Cecil swore a fearful oath. "He shall listen to me!"

His wife tossed her head. The crushing blow of this revelation made her malignantly desirous to pay some one for what she was suffering. Cecil seemed a fitting person, besides being the first at hand. "I should think it was sufficiently clear that this is Neal's chance for revenge. Remember we were not married, you and I, when he called you 'poor fellow.' Why should he tell you now where she is, if he would not even then?"

There was no reply; there could be none to that question. At length Cecil spoke. His voice was rough and uncertain: —

"You shall ask him."

"Cecil! I?"

He caught her by the shoulders, thrusting his face forward into hers. "He must tell. You understand that much? Then don't you see you are the one to ask him?"

"Oh, my God!" cried Eve Loveland. "And I am married to this man."

"Damn you, I want no heroics. This is strictly business. In some way, we must get that information from him; what other way is open?"

Eve pressed her lips together. She could not stir while he held her as in a vise, but she would not answer him.

"If my position and the Loveland patent are not worth" —

Still she was silent. Cecil, regarding her nervously, dropped his arms. She moved at once away.

In her hasty gesture, the scissors snapped from the silver chain at her waist. They fell, and lay on the floor between them. In truth, Cecil failed to notice the thing, abstracted as he was by this vital interest. A woman is never beyond such trifles: they go to make up her life. When Eve stooped to recover her trinket, and Cecil did not forestall her, she experienced the same bitterness in kind, although not in degree, as when she listened in horror to the tale concerning Toinette Loveland, or to the proposal that she coax Neal's secret from him. The world — her world — was rocking underneath her feet.

"Will you do it?"

She scanned that bad little face for a sign of manliness. It was suddenly revealed to her that dishonor cannot, in the nature of things, manifest itself but once. He who could win her from another man must show again and again and again the like ignoble standard, the like confusion between right and wrong. And all that was true of him was equally true of her. She realized it, while her brain was juggling with this question of what they were to do.

Through the mizmaze of mingled theory and fact, Cecil's voice broke sharply: "You, yourself, said he would not tell it to me."

"I know."

"Then how under heaven, — by Jupiter, I have it. Mary shall be the one to ask him."

Eve clenched her hands together till the nails cut into the palms. Yes, there was an alternative. She need not blame Cecil, beyond the irrevocable fact that he had harbored that idea. She need harass herself no longer with unworthy considerations whether she might agree to her husband's plan. For here was an alternative.

Cecil's man appeared at the door. He received orders to saddle a horse at once.

"Take the gig," said Eve. "I shall go with you."

"Did you hear me?" questioned her husband aside. "I said Mary should ask it of him."

"I heard you. Nevertheless, I am going out to the Pasture."

Cecil was uneasy; but Saunders waited for his decision, and the master could not openly demur. He directed that the gig be brought to the door, inquiring, when they were once more alone: —

"What is this freak, Eve? Why are you set on accompanying me? I do not understand you."

"I do not understand myself," said his wife wearily, "only that I wish to go with you."

His comprehension of the shock she had received sufficed to leave her to herself during their preparations and the long drive to the Bush. Indeed,

he was entirely preoccupied, beyond the new hope that sprang from what Eve had divulged, in bewildering theories regarding Neal's source of information, and a degrading sense of all he suffered in pity at those hands. He had also to debate whether or no Lady Anne would receive his wife. She had been kind to him, in their rare encounters since his marriage, while he sought to ingratiate himself, by every remaining means, into the goodwill doubly desired if the Loveland patent went to Annetje. My lady was very rich in her own right. Cecil could not afford to offend her by presenting Eve unbidden.

He pursued one fleeting reflection after another, paying scant attention to the gay little lady beside him, who gazed out of her beehive bonnet upon roads she had often traveled, and always with one other man. She, likewise, was lost in thought. Unaccustomed as Eve was to the employment of her mind, these past four months could but develop her understanding no less than her character. She had taken Neal for granted, like the exercise of her faculties. She had understood no more what it meant to be deprived of him than what it was to be blind, or deaf. She learned that lesson, day by day, one experience at a time. It must be through the primitive sensations that such a woman was touched. Jealousy was the key which opened to her the depths of her love for Neal.

"There he is!" Cecil exclaimed, as they drove through the entrance gateway. "He is walking yonder in the kitchen-garden with Annetje."

"That is not Neal," Eve replied. "He is on the stoop with your sister. The other man must be General Johnson."

"So it is," said Cecil. "You have good sight to tell them apart at that distance. I could not do it."

Neal had seen her almost at the same moment. Mary noticed how his hand gripped the rail on which he leaned. The color left his cheek, his lips set firmly. "Would you prefer to slip away?" she whispered in her sympathetic voice. "You can disappear into the summer parlor, and I will detain them here until you are safely gone."

"Why should I go?" he answered. "There is nothing from which to flee." Accordingly, he ran down the steps to aid Mrs. Loveland in alighting from the carriage.

Mary kissed the new arrivals, sent Pomp for Annetje, and led them into the hall. "If you do not mind," she observed, "we will leave Aunt Anne to herself. She is taking her nap, at present."

Cecil caught her significant glance, smiling back his satisfaction with this arrangement. General Johnson covered any remaining embarrassment by his unsuspicious bearing when he and the lady of the house appeared. Annetje was formally civil, but he talked for them both. He had so many questions to put to the lieutenant, so persistently included Neal in their military gossip, that the women were left to their own resources until tea was served.

While they sat about the broad, cool hall, and ate their pastry and cracked nuts and many sorts of cake, Cecil disengaged himself from the loquacious soldier, striving to gain his sister's attention and draw her apart for a conference. He was vexed anew at her folly, as he saw how persistently, though how deftly, she managed to keep close to Neal. It interfered with his present plans, it made a fool of her, he said to himself. Still he was relieved, too, that it gave the handsome young fellow no opportunity to pay court to Annetje, who seemed to become the more reserved in contrast with Mary's wooing of their guest. Cecil did not wish his sister to throw herself away on Neal. It was preferable, however, to his winning the heiress assuredly of the Pasture, possibly to the great patent. Such an outcome of the situation was unendurable, Cecil told himself, even to one's fancy.

Eve was near the western doorway, by herself, it chanced, in the careless grouping of their chairs. General Johnson considered her awed by her surroundings. The other women knew she observed every word and gesture of theirs, and that Neal Sleight's movements were not lost on Mrs. Loveland more than on either of them.

Seeing Annetje about to pour herself some tea, Neal sprang to his feet and waited on her. He passed Eve, looking rather forlorn in her social Coventry. "May I bring you another dish?" said he.

She handed her cup to him, her fingers twitch-

ing. A bracelet caught in the embroidered bag at her side, her matron's chatelaine that held various small belongings. She pulled awkwardly at the ornament without releasing it. Neal took her plate, and then, in his dexterous fashion, slipped the bracelet over her hand. "Now you are free," he reassured her.

What was this he felt, — this which made him at peace with all the world? Perhaps relief was the predominant emotion, for he imagined that Eve had lost her power to move him. So he smiled down at her in very kindly fashion.

Mrs. Loveland impatiently jerked bag and bracelet asunder. As she did so, the former snapped open and something fell out on her lap. It was a faded bit of jasmine. Was it accident or artifice? She started, as if vexed, and dropped the spray upon the ground.

Neal knelt to recover it. Long ago, in the wilderness, where so much else was left behind, he had lost, after a man's careless fashion, the broken sixpence and the flower he promised to keep. After a man's careless fashion they were forgotten. This woman remembered hers. He handed the bit to Eve, her eyes devouring his face. Could he fail to recognize it, he who had been true while she was faithless to their troth? Yet she treasured her spray of jasmine, and he did not know what it meant.

Cecil approached his wife, just then, whereupon Neal moved away. Eve motioned her husband that he was to bend down to her lips. "Cecil,"

she whispered. "I will do it. Let me speak to him."

"I intend to ask Mary," he answered stiffly, "in a moment, when I can get her to myself."

"She could not. I have watched them, and I know. Let me, Cecil."

Her eyes were like jewels in the dusk. Her cheeks glowed richly warm. Cecil thought, gazing at her in indecision, that no man could resist her when she looked like that. And this man had loved her once.

The Loveland patent was at stake.

"It shall be as you please," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE SUMMER PARLOR

"No man's soul is alone: Laocoön or Tobit, the serpent has it by the heart, or the angel by the hand." — JOHN RUSKIN.

CECIL'S impulse was still to consult his sister, a fixed habit not easily broken. He found there was risen a counter-influence with which to reckon, for Eve read his design.

"Keep this from Mary," was her hurried direction. "She will not like it."

Cecil scowled.

"And she would want to try her own persuasion. She could not coax him. I have seem them together — I know. He cares nothing whatever for her."

"Judging as you judge, from his manner to-night," Cecil remarked, "I should say the fellow cares nothing whatever for you."

"Ah, but he avoids me with cause," Eve insisted, though her heart was faint. "With Mary and Annetje it can be only indifference."

At that moment General Johnson called from the stoop to Cecil. "Come out in the moonlight, man. Sleight and I are enjoying our pipes together. Will not Mrs. Loveland permit you to join us?"

Cecil glanced distractedly about him. He felt

goaded into instant execution of his purpose. Annetje was disappearing into the north parlor. Mary halted, irresolute, in the wide doorway, looking out towards Neal. He must arrange the figures for the dance.

"Stay you here," he muttered to his wife. "I will send him to you."

He went up to his sister, to whom he spoke imperatively. "I have to see you alone at once. I shall come to your rooms within ten minutes. Wait for me there."

Then he passed on to the stoop. "I think," he observed, taking a light from his superior officer, "that my pretty cousin prefers the romance of a stroll in the orchard, this sultry night, to our society. I saw her, but now, stealing across the grass. And, imprudent girl, she has gone out into the dew without her scarf."

He held up the wrap he caught from a chair in the hall. Neal and William Johnson both arose. "I will go," began the younger man. His general drowned the words.

"I shall take it to her, myself. In the apple orchard, you said?"

Cecil acquiesced, aware that Annetje, by this time, was probably with Lady Anne, and hoping that the quest might be indefinitely prolonged. Johnson ran down the steps and disappeared among the trees, Neal watching him out of sight.

Now came what was to Cecil the hardest part of this evening's task.

"Sleight," he began, "I am grateful for a mo-

ment with you alone. I have long desired to ask, can you find it in your soul to forgive the wrong that I committed?"

"Yes," said Neal.

Cecil peered up at the head high above him, as they sat on the sidewise bench together. "I acknowledge all I did," he continued, "while neither one is likely to overlook the provocation. I took unfair advantage of your absence" —

"Had I been present," Neal interrupted, "it must have happened in the end. I could not hold my own against you."

He spoke simply, but Cecil knew what he was thinking, that Eve Verbeeck's hand went to the highest bidder. The truth of the implication lashed him like a whip. It roused the strange sign of fury in him which made him cry out the facts that hurt him rather than his hearer.

"Not hold your own," he repeated, in sullen scorn. "Why, it is laughable," and he laughed, "to witness your widespread conquests, — you, the irresistible Adonis of Albany!"

"That will do." Neal knocked the ashes from his pipe. "I give you credit for not intending to make a mock of me. Yet it sounds like it when we both remember the one woman who ever had a tender thought for me so readily transferred her love."

He had risen, and Cecil, too, sprang upright. His voice cracked. "When we remember there are three women under this roof who would follow you to the world's end, if you lifted a finger to beckon."

"She would not!" cried Neal.

The Loveland patent meant heaven to Cecil, and men have done much to win heaven.

"Ask her, and see," he replied.

He waved his hand towards the open door. For himself, he descended the steps and went along the garden walk. Neal, dazed, animated by a thrilling hope, took a long stride into the house.

On the table at the foot of the winding stairs stood two candles, whose light served rather to deepen than to relieve the gloom. The chairs drawn forward during tea had been pushed stiffly against the wall, — all save one, that was turned to face the western porch. A woman sat there, looking towards the last shreds of sunset cloud. Neal crossed the space between them and bent over her.

"Are you here alone?" said he.

"Yes, Neal." Eve gazed up at him.

He fell back, coloring with displeasure. "I beg your pardon. I mistook you for — another person."

"I might have known," wailed Eve, "you would not speak so gently to me." To his consternation, she buried her face in her hands. He caught the sound of sobs.

"This is folly," Neal declared, endeavoring to be judicial and hard. "It is of no importance how I speak, nor what I think of you. If it were, I might say there is no anger in those thoughts."

He was amazed to find this did not soothe her.

"Since you have ceased to be angry," Eve moaned, "you must be indifferent."

Neal did not answer.

Suddenly the girl rose and faced him. She faced the candle-light as well, and Neal could see how lovely she was to-night. In her becoming dress, her great eyes bright with tears beneath the powdered hair, her cheeks scarlet, she bent her head and shot a glance up at him beneath her lashes, the old Eve he had wooed, a thousand-fold more beautiful, a thousand-fold — unless he dreamed — more loving than ever before.

She clasped her hands dramatically. "If you do not care," she said, "at least you may have patience to listen to my defense. You cannot know how I was persuaded, what pressure was brought to bear. I had been left alone, and you were gone so long! My mother urged me to it — Yet you blame only me."

"I blame no one, Eve. It was natural, I see that now, to such a girl as you. I am thankful this came before it was too late."

Her eyes fell. "The worst is," she said in a whisper, "for me it was too late."

"Hush!"

"Neal, I must speak. I must speak — this once — or I shall go mad with the thought of it. I never guessed what you meant to me. I took you for granted. You were always there. You were always ready and eager. When you left me to myself, I felt the loss horribly, horribly. I grasped at the first substitute. I did not know there was no substitute. I cannot bear it. I cannot, Neal."

"Hush," he said again between his teeth.

He could not utter another syllable. He comprehended how vain had been his boast in deeming himself free forever from her influence. The roots of his love were planted deeper than he dreamed. He had not pulled them all away.

Eve laid her folded hands on his breast. "Nealie," she breathed.

He moved his head restlessly. He would not touch those clinging fingers, yet to stir was to strike them down, and that he could not do. With bewilderment she saw the gesture. A year ago she shaped Neal's will to hers; now she could not make him listen.

"Are you a man?" she cried in a quavering undertone.

He looked full into her eyes. "Yes," he answered, "and not a beast."

Her arms dropped at her side. Neal took a step backward. "I am scarcely the one to remind you," he said hoarsely, "of your duties as a wife. I realize all you said but now was an impulse to be regretted by and by. Remember, when that time comes, that I understood. You and I have known each other always, Eve." He forced a smile to his lips as he gazed down at her. "There is no need to tell me you will recall your husband's rights; nor of showing you I am not the sort to make love to the wife of another man."

She stood picking at the chatelaine hanging from her belt. Her face was still uplifted, and he met the piteous, childlike expression that had many a time in the past confused his sense of right. His

remonstrance recalled to Eve the purpose of this interview, slipped till then from her memory. She did not see how to interject it into the tragedy she had precipitated. However, the result was all-important to her husband and to herself, and this was, she reflected drearily, the last chance she would ever have — ever. She must speak.

"Neal," she began, with an instantaneous change of manner, "you remind me of what I may be to Cecil. I see how I might help him unless you prevent it. Do you remember once telling me of the pity you felt for him?"

"Yes."

"Possibly I have discovered what you meant. Was it because of his mother that you were sorry for him?"

"Yes," said Neal again.

"Where is his mother?" asked Eve.

Neal was about to speak, when a door opened behind him. He turned quickly, almost guiltily, it appeared. Annetje paused on the threshold of the north parlor.

Eve shrank farther into the shadow, Neal advancing to meet the juffrouw. She analyzed every detail of this encounter, — the two who had been lovers standing in intimate talk, both agitated, both starting at her approach. "Pardon me," she said coldly. "I had no idea there was any one here. I am afraid I have intruded."

"Could that be, mejuffrouw, in your own house?" asked Neal, with a desperate attempt at ease. "Mrs. Loveland was inquiring for some

knowledge I happen to possess on family matters. 'T is of no consequence."

"Of no consequence!" Eve repeated to herself, calling up all she and Cecil had risked to gain what Neal could give them. She waited in an agony the outcome of Annetje's interruption, for this opportunity could never return. Neal would never willingly speak to her again. Annetje hesitated, still haughty of manner, but assuring herself it were best for both that she remain with them. Eve grew desperate as Neal made a motion towards placing a chair for his hostess. He was obviously relieved to close their conversation.

"I regret," said Mrs. Loveland, "that I must be so rude, yet I am obliged to beg the favor of another word in private. This, mejuffrouw, is a matter of great moment both to my husband and myself."

Neal paused, one hand on the back of the chair. Annetje turned at once. "I would not for worlds interfere with the conference," she declared, her voice higher than its wonted pitch. "Or — for I hear General Johnson on the walk without — shall I not intercept him, and keep him likewise away?"

"If you would be so good."

Neal took no part in all this. He stood in obvious discomfort, while Annetje swept past him, her chin elevated, her glance determined not to meet his own. He was utterly miserable. Nothing could more effectually quench the ardor of his old love in its show of resurrection than the sight of

her whom he held now in his heart contemptuous of the position in which Eve had placed him. He listened with strained ears to Annetje's greeting of the officer on the steps outside. Low-toned sentences were brought to him in disjointed words. There was a sweet, faint laugh, with its deeper echo. He wrenched his attention back to Eve, who saw the effort. "What was it you wanted to know?"

"I will not detain you, Neal. I understand you wish to go to Annetje. But I ask only for a moment."

"We need not discuss my wishes." He had had enough of sentiment. "Will you kindly tell me what it is you want to know?"

"Where is Cecil's mother?"

Neal started, regarding her sharply. "I do not feel at liberty to answer until I understand your motives in putting such a question."

Eve trembled for the success of her cause. She could overcome these scruples only by explaining her husband's straits, he who was Neal's enemy, while she acknowledged her own power over this man was gone. In desperation she spoke: "I am in Cecil's confidence. I have been told the worst there was to learn concerning that woman. She has or may have in her possession a secret of tremendous worth to him. Neal, for the sake of all I was to you, and all I was to be, tell me where she is."

She misinterpreted his hesitancy. "I know you do not care for me," she continued, with the tact-

less persistency of a dull mind. "Yet there was a time when you cared. Remember it, Neal, and tell me where Cecil's mother is to be found."

"I would do that much for less cause," he answered. In his soul he was wondering if Eve had ever understood him. He gave the past year less than its due for the changes it had wrought. "I should have said what I have to say long ago, had I seen good reason to speak. Your husband's mother is at La Presentation."

"Thank you, oh, thank you!" she cried, with a sigh of relief. "You are very generous."

Neal's lip curled. "I don't fight that way, Eve," said he. "Understand, and make your husband understand, this was not suppressed through malice." As he uttered the words, a recollection came to him of the interview with Cecil on the stoop. His eyes glowed. "Nor was there need," he went on, "to employ you in cajoling my secret out of me. If Loveland knew me so little, at least you might have known."

Before she could answer, he brushed past her and ran up the stairs to his room.

CHAPTER XXV

TONSURED

— "And wrapt me in a gown:
I was entangled in a world of strife,
Before I had power to change my life."

GEORGE HERBERT.

DURING the next few days Neal sought persistently for an interview with Annetje. He told himself he merely wished to be set right in her eyes; that while the heiress of the Pasture and recipient of his general's admiration could be nothing to him, it was but just to set his conduct so far straight before her as might be done without implication of Eve Loveland. Annetje, however, was not to be convinced. Mary's manœuvres were henceforth unnecessary to separate the two, Lady Anne's invalidism furnishing an excuse for devotion to her and absence from the family group; and Annetje so availed herself of these opportunities that neither the older officer nor the young soldier could secure a word apart with her.

Not that General Johnson had more leisure than herself, for these were stirring days. Early in the year the English ministry decided to send out four expeditions against the French, — in Acadia, to Fort Du Quesne, to Fort Niagara, and Crown Point. The first was successful, but, from lack

of resistance, not decisive. While New York was preparing for the attack upon Niagara and Crown Point came the news of defeat at Fort Du Quesne.

William Johnson actually shed tears over the details of that awful march and its ending. "Braddock showed only contempt for our provincials," said he to Neal, "and for the notion that we could advise him concerning his treatment of the Indians. He sneered at Benjamin Franklin's council and that of his own aide-de-camp, young Washington. He proceeded as if waging war on European battlefields. The colonists were maddened by his delays, his slow progress, and his absurd preparations. But after they reached the fort, all dispatches say no more soul-stirring sight was ever witnessed than that advance: scarlet coats gleaming in the sun, colors flying, the beat of drums, — it put new life into every man. Beaujeau came out against them in his fantastic hunting-dress, a silver gorget round his neck. The apparition struck terror to the English, but" (in fierce rejoicing) "they killed him, for all that. Braddock was bold as a lion. He lost four horses under him. Two were shot under Washington, and his clothes riddled with bullets. I tell you, Sleight, there is a man! Poor Braddock's courage could not take the place of common sense. When the provincials hid behind trees to fight the savages after their own fashion, they were driven forth, despite Washington's prayer, and formed into platoons, — and lost. Of course they were cut down. Braddock fell at their head, poor man, fatally wounded, and the day closed in a panic-stricken flight."

Neal had listened with whitening cheek. "What will be the effect upon our native allies?" said he.

"You can guess. They were treated with scorn and alienated. Now that Washington has succeeded the Englishman as our commander-in-chief, let us hope we may win over some Indians who have deserted to the French. The Miamis say already they will join us, if 'those across the seas' leave us to conduct the campaign for ourselves."

"As we in New Netherland are to do," Neal suggested.

He did not like the dark frown on Johnson's brow. "Would these tidings had not come," said the wise man in a troubled voice, "before Shirley's troops started for Niagara."

The wish was common in Albany, where were gathered six thousand men, among them Israel Putnam, John Stark, and Ephraim Williams, he who was now making the will by which a future college should benefit. These soldiers had no great confidence in Shirley, nor were they taken unawares when, in the time between the start of his expedition and their own, intelligence was brought to them of desertions, of sickness, of disabling delays. The result was inevitable.

Under such circumstances Johnson's men set out for Lake Horicon. One night, as the family at the Pasture rose from the tea-table, Neal Sleight arrested Annetje's departure.

"Give me a moment, please, juffrouw," he implored. "Before I go, I have to thank you for your hospitality and to say farewell. I leave here on the morrow."

Mary reseated herself by the table. Annetje stretched out one hand and rested it heavily upon the back of a chair. She did not speak directly. When her voice came, it had a curious, guarded sound. "Is not this sudden?" she inquired. "Surely you told me, general, that you might remain with us for a month longer, at the least."

"Oh, yes, I," that officer rejoined in his hearty tones. "The artillery, the boats, and the provisions will be several weeks in collecting. I shall wait for them. The troops march to-morrow, as Sleight says. Have you made your preparations, lad? Have you bade good-by to your friends at the Fuyck?"

He spoke with that affection every one — every one save Cecil Loveland — came to feel for Neal. "Yes," was the curt answer. The young fellow thought of his interview that morning with Maria. After a moment he went on: "I have taken leave of all except the ladies here."

"But, Neal," urged Mary in soft reproach, "you gave us no warning of this."

"Did I not? It must have been because I was so occupied, and — I saw so little of you."

Mary glanced at him sharply. In consideration of her decided pursuit, the statement sounded like an insult, but she found his eyes were bent on Annetje. "At what hour must you leave the Pasture?" she inquired.

"Before sunrise. I will say good-by, then, with good-night. And may I see Lady Anne?"

"I can take you to her," Mary volunteered, as

her cousin's lips parted. "We will run upstairs together. Annetje, are you coming, too?"

Annetje shook her head, extending a very cold little hand to Neal, who raised it to his lips. She stumbled through some incoherent phrases, and he responded huskily. Then she fled into the north parlor, leaving Mary to conduct Neal to her aunt. General Johnson stood unnoticed beside the disordered table. He wore a smile, half jeering and half kind.

"So it was not alone my children's solitude," he said to himself, "that made Neal Sleight their hero. God bless the fellow, I can't help loving him. Yet how he throws all other men into the shade!"

Dawn comes early in July. Early as it was, it found Mary Loveland astir. She was no sooner dressed than she crept noiselessly to her door, lifted the latch, and waited to make sure there was a sound in the passage. The soldiers' rooms were near hers, and she spoke. "Is that you, Neal?"

Silence followed for a little. Then: "It is I — Annetje," an icy tone replied.

"Oh!" Mary laughed under her breath. "So we are both preparing to see our guest depart. I thought I would make the poor fellow a dish of tea, and give him something to eat."

She still spoke from behind her partly opened door. Annetje's answer emerged from a like seclusion: "I left directions overnight. His breakfast is prepared."

"That was kind of you. There is nothing, then,

for me to do, but bid Neal Godspeed, and see him safe away. And you?"

"You know I will not," said Annetje, with decision. "Two of us! 'T would be ridiculous, — more ridiculous, I mean." The sentence was emphasized by the slamming of her door.

Smiling to herself, although little inclined to mirth, Mary entered the dining-room, where she discovered Neal making a hearty onslaught upon the food.

"It was good of the juffrouw," said he across his brimming plate, "thus to provide for my welfare. You will tell her how grateful I am for a last favor?"

"Why, *I* thought of it," Mary acknowledged, then went on rapidly, as she bent to fill his cup from the teapot: "this may be our last meeting, Neal. When you come back — I will not think but you do come back — perhaps I shall not be at the Pasture."

"Why not?" asked Neal.

"If Annetje wed our remaining guest (and all signs point to it), this household must be scattered. I could not follow my brother's fortunes, so I may return with Lady Anne to England."

"You think they are sure to marry?"

"As to that," lifting her brows, "it goes without saying that she has other suitors; an heiress lacks no chance to change her lot. Yet none other is her peer in position and wealth, while she would not stoop below them. And 't is plain she fancies the commissary."

"Well," said Neal, rising, "I must go."

He reached his hand to Mary, who took it in both of hers. "God be with you, dear, dear Neal," she whispered.

Her face was very near. She was sweetly sorry to lose him; he was miserable and all alone in the world. So he kissed her.

He was gone. The door closed behind him. From her window, Annetje followed the gallop of his horse, until that sound of flying feet was lost in the distance. In the dining-room, Mary stood by an empty chair.

General Phinehas Lyman led the troops out of Albany, and without incident, to the beginning of the portage to the lake. Here, they raised a defense, which was called Fort Edward. A month later, Johnson joined them, after harassing delays by reason of the reluctance of the country to furnish means of transportation. He passed the fort to the shore of what was called, by the Indians, Horicon; by the French, St. Sacrament; by the general, Lake George. Of this encampment, surrounded by woods, or swamps, or water, Philip Schuyler's company became a part. To Neal's amazement, he found Cecil Loveland among the last arrivals.

Every provincial was aware of the derision in which their expedition was held by the regulars. "The fools" were to have their headstrong way. The army stood prepared to set their blunders right, to show what scientific warfare was, after their mishaps had convinced them that they could

achieve nothing of themselves. Neal demanded of the general the reason for Cecil's presence here, and was put off with what he felt was a subterfuge.

Meanwhile, other events came on. Johnson planned to raise a fort on Lake George, to ascend Lake Champlain, to fortify Ticonderoga, and proceed against Fort Frederick. Those Indians who were to supplement his forces assembled with suspicious reluctance. Neal's old friend Hendrick arrived, bringing the information that Shirley was coaxing Johnson's men away to join himself. And this little army by the lake was the sole protection of Schenectady, Albany, and the Hudson valley.

One day, old Hendrick sought the general's tent. The two men were conferring together, when Neal inadvertently intruded upon them with a message.

"Lad," said Johnson excitedly, "what think you of our news? The French are within a day's journey. Dieskau is leading them against Fort Edward."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. King Hendrick received the word."

Neal stared blankly from one sachem to the other. "What is to be done?"

"The fort must be warned," quoth Hendrick.

"Sir, send me."

Johnson smiled at the quick response, but he shook his head decidedly. "'T is a ticklish business, Sleight. Hendrick thinks they have lost their way. In that event, they are on the road to the lake, instead of the fort. And should they fall in with our messenger" —

"Yet messenger there must be — you concede that," Neal insisted. "Then why not I as well as another? Some one has to assume the danger."

"Not you, lad."

"I have it!" His face was illumined. "There need be no danger. I shall go as the Black Gown."

The sachems exchanged a glance. Both knew of the man he meant. It was the commissary's influence, exerted against La Presentation, that saved the Iroquois nation to the English, while old Hendrick had often withstood Jesuitical blandishments. Johnson recalled the tale his men brought with them after their journey to Albany, six months ago. "He was once mistaken for the priest," he explained to Hendrick. "I verily believe it could be done."

"I know it could," Neal argued. "Should I fall in with the enemy, I do not deserve to be saved if I cannot play my part."

"But the dress," Hendrick objected. "Where shall we find the dress?"

They studied this problem in silence. "Lieutenant Loveland has some trappings," suggested the general. "I will send for him. Perhaps he may find what shall serve our purpose amongst his womanish curtains and blankets. 'T is there or nowhere."

Cecil came instantly to the summons. Johnson told him of the menace to Fort Edward, of Neal's offer, and added abruptly: —

"Now, the thing stands thus: have you the

wherewithal to deck this foolhardy fellow out in the likeness of a priest? For so it is he will go, disguised as a Jesuit."

Neal was horrified by the light that leaped into the other's eyes. It was a shock to find himself so hated. Moreover, it accentuated the perils of his undertaking, while proving to him how entirely his own enmity had died out against the man who won Eve Verbeeck.

"Oh, I can robe him well!" cried Cecil. "Leave everything to me. But — have you not forgotten? He must wear a shaven crown." He grinned, so that he raised one slender hand to his mouth to hide its glee.

"Poor little wretch," thought Neal. "He imagines I cherish my good looks."

General Johnson remembered the girl waiting at the Pasture for Neal. "How is that, Sleight?" he asked uneasily.

"Certainly, I must have a tonsure," said Neal. "And why not? Can your man shave me, sir?"

"I can, I can!" Cecil clamored, like a forth-putting schoolboy. "Place yourself entirely in my hands. You shall find what an excellent costumer I am."

"Very well," Neal assented carelessly. He smiled down at Cecil. "I have no interest in these details. The main point is that I go. And I see you agree with me there, Loveland. For once we do not differ."

CHAPTER XXVI

FACE TO FACE

"It is frequently less disastrous to do the wrong thing than nothing at all." — BISMARCK.

FOR hours the four men, calling in Cecil's servant to aid them in constructing the soutane, worked over Neal's disguise, and by midnight the priest stood before them, complete in appearance, ready for the start.

"You look like your brother," King Hendrick observed. Neal gave an apprehensive start. Did the Indian suspect who his third visitor had been that night one year ago? If so, must he not doubt the honesty of Johnson's messenger? But he detected no trace of questioning on the stolid features, and the others failed to catch what was said.

Cecil, too, looked the tall figure over from tonsure to clinging skirts.

"Perdition seize the fellow," he thought, "he is handsomer than ever."

"I will accompany you beyond the camp," the general offered. "Here! throw this cloak over your dress till we have passed the guard. The mission is a secret, to be kept among ourselves, gentlemen, remember. Now, Sleight!"

Neal took an elaborate farewell of the sachem, lounging in his unwieldy bulk upon a pile of rugs. Then, in preparing to leave the tent, he came face to face with Cecil. At that moment, when his spirit was strengthened to meet the possibilities of a novel adventure, old petty passions shriveled up as in a flame. This man had meant to harm him, — yes. But Neal was not harmed. He would not add even to himself that he pitied Eve's husband and was thankful for his own deliverance. He extended his hand.

"Good-by, Lieutenant Loveland," he began. "We never were friends, I know. I pray you, forget all that as I forget it, and wish me well," — if he had paused here! but he went on, — "and should I not return, will you tell the juffrouw Kierstiede — will you say to her that my last thought was of the Pasture when I went out to my death?"

It is a terrifying reflection how often any of us may speak such words, innocent, careless, bearing no hidden significance, yet destined to sow seed in our lives, or in others', whose harvest shall be the eternities. Neal spoke, and his future and Cecil's were the result.

Loveland muttered some unintelligible phrase, letting the other's hand fall hurriedly. General Johnson, leading the way among the tents, recalled the message which confirmed his conclusions of two months since, bringing up the picture of Annetje's parting with Neal.

The time came for him to turn back. "It

frightens me to send you forth," he said earnestly. "Not alone for your sake, either, though I love you, but for those sweet eyes that would weep, went anything amiss. I think of the juffrouw, and I tremble."

They had paused under the pine-trees. In the dim starlight they returned each others' gaze.

"This from you?" Neal stammered. "You fancy she would care?"

"I know."

"God bless you for telling me" (he wrung the officer's fingers); "then I start with a light heart. But, general — one moment! — what makes you imagine she cares?"

"You great child!" (Johnson clapped him on the shoulder) "as if we could tarry here at this crisis, discussing a woman's ways! She is yours indeed, and entirely, Neal. That truth must suffice for the present. And fare you well."

Once more Neal uttered some bashful thanks. He gave his general's hand a mighty grip. Immediately he swung away at his long stride into the vastness of the woods.

The trees seemed to reach out, gathering him into their shade. The path he followed was so undefined that none except a native or a pioneer could have guessed it to be a road. He walked rapidly, his spirit high, his brain sending again and again to his heart the words William Johnson had said, — "I know! I know!" He went on and on in the dark, repeating the exclamation like a charm. There was call upon whatever confidence

this dear assurance could give. Neal realized the dangers he confronted, striving to fortify himself by the memory of countless hairbreadth escapes in the course of his boyhood. Underneath it all, he knew this was the worst that had come to him. The loneliness, the horror of blackness, the uncertainty of every step, — they were the last hideous touches to a fearful undertaking.

It was not yet light, although he had traveled for hours. The days grew perceptibly shorter. Neal began to wonder if he might not reach Fort Edward before the dawn.

What was that?

He stopped in the rough way, head erect like a stag, trying to pierce the gloom which shut in the woods, hearkening breathlessly for a repetition of that sound. "'T was a sleeping beast that stirred," Neal told himself, and so he set out again. "This silence, this utter darkness," he concluded, "have got on my nerves. I feel as if everybody and every object besides myself had been blotted out of existence."

Something sprang upon his back.

Neal's first idea was that a catamount threw itself from a tree branch on to his shoulders. He flung himself backward instantly, crashing to the ground. Thus only he could hope to dislodge his assailant.

The manœuvre might have served, had it been a panther which caught and held him fast. It was not a panther. No sooner did he strike the ground than a score of indistinct figures glided out from

behind the trees. They fell upon him, binding him with flying thongs. Without speech, without useless protest upon Neal's part, he was made a prisoner.

He at once perceived how delicate was the position in which he stood. If these men should prove to be Canadians, his appearance must serve him well. On the other hand, they might be Mohawks, proceeding to the camp. In that case he was doomed. No excuse could pardon one found in a cassock. He waited silently, with fluttering breath, to learn what their first word should tell him. His life hung on a thread.

They pulled him upright, bound securely as he was. In a guttural whisper they conferred together, while, strain his hearing as he might, Neal could form nothing from what was said. A pair of long, slim hands stole over his face. They ran up to his hair. He felt them twitch as they touched the tonsure. There was a gasping grunt.

Did this mean hope or despair?

The hands fell to his neck. They flew down his breast, pulling the flapping soutane out by its many folds. "'T is the Black Gown!" said a voice in French.

This was all in the impenetrable shadow of the night and the forest. Neal could barely distinguish the forms about him sufficiently to know them to be men, while they had learned his identity as the blind might do. There was an instant outcry, arrested by his voice, assured and commanding: "Enough, my children. You have seen that

I am the Black Gown, who would go on his way in peace."

This was too easy an escape. A subdued demur waxed gradually louder and determined. "May we not march with you, father?" said one man, "and so guard you from all harm. The English are near at hand."

"How near?" asked Neal.

Their reply convinced him that old Hendrick's information, however mysteriously obtained, was on the whole correct. The French had been proceeding to Fort Edward, when they lost their way, took the wrong road, and the main body of troops at this moment rapidly neared Johnson's camp. Neal felt a quickened thrill of longing thrusting aside the question of this encounter's end. On the morrow a battle must be fought, the battle to which all provincials looked, wherein they should show the regulars, the ministry, the king, that they were fit to stand alone. And he might not be with them to strike a blow, — a blow for independence.

Again he sought to shake off the companionship of these men. Again, with good-natured persistence, they refused to forsake him. "We go in your direction," they urged. "Allow us to attend our father."

He was forced to consent. They led him on for a half hour more, and then the dawn began to break. They could see one another distinctly, as they marched through the silent woods. At last and at the same instant white man and Indians

caught alike the sound of approaching feet. Some one, more than one, came near, treading as cautiously as they the road of the wilderness. Each, acting on his own impulse, glided among the trees. Sheltered behind a giant oak, Neal watched his comrades dispose themselves in like hiding-places. He listened, his head pressed against the bark, to the oncoming march. Were these friends or foes? Would his presence help or hinder? What new complications might arise?

A Frenchman, unmistakable in his partly savage guise, appeared in an accidental clearing between the two parties. At his heels were a dozen men, a few white, the greater number savages of the north. Neal's companions darted forth to meet them. He was obliged to follow and simulate the same delight. The Frenchman's eyes protruded, his jaw dropped.

"You, Père Daubiny?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, friend," said Neal, in an affectation of ease. "And for what reason do you gape at me as if I were, it may be, the ghost of myself?"

"Father, are you a wizard?" He came closer, still staring at Neal.

"No, no," Neal answered with a smile. "Once more, why do you ask?"

His heart was thumping in his breast. Why did the Frenchman ask?

He was not to learn at that time. The other spread out his palms in a gesture of deprecation.

"No matter," he replied. "And yet you are a wizard. I am he who has discovered it."

He turned to his men and these others with whom they had fallen in. "Shall we rest, for a little, awaiting here our friends' arrival? This is a spot where fire might be kindled, nor would food come amiss to me."

They assented, as they should to any proposition this white man chose to make them. He seated himself on a fallen tree-trunk, motioning Neal to rest beside him. In the silence of fatigue, they observed the movements of the natives, who gathered together fagots into a pile, and produced their supply of beef and ground corn. One found a spring of water, another prepared the breakfast, bringing it humbly to lay on his masters' knees.

This meal eaten, the group smoked and discussed the hour at which they might expect to be overtaken by the detachment wherein Neal's first companions and these later comers alike belonged. One by one, the men began to nod about their fire. The cheerful warmth, agreeable on an autumn morning, the abundant meal, and the wakeful night combined to lull them irresistibly to sleep. The Frenchman no sooner witnessed these signs of carelessness in others than he was wide awake. Energetic, domineering, he set a watch, and ordered the men so designated to their places. In another moment, with his courtly bearing and gracious smile, he offered Neal half of his cloak, and they lay down against the fallen tree together.

Neal was confident it would be impossible for him to close his eyes. The situation was so hazardous, he could so little foretell its chances, that

he must lie awake and scheme and scheme, while those about him took their rest. How should he escape? Or should he return to the camp in their train? It was clear Fort Edward required no warning, and no less clear that it would be impracticable to carry such word back to Johnson at Lake George. Was it impracticable? He raised his head, peering cautiously around the encampment. Two men were guarding it, with guns on shoulder. He was met by the surprised glance of one as he peered from his wrappings. No, there was not the least hope of eluding their vigilance. Neal sank down into the Frenchman's cloak. He would better, he concluded, catch a few minutes' slumber, and thus prepare himself for the coming day, a day that, whatever it brought, must be of vital importance to himself. He was soothed by the resolve. Wearied from physical and mental strain, Neal's head fell forward on his breast. He was fast asleep.

A cry wakened him, piercing to his soul. Low, yet penetrating, it was the expression of absolute bewilderment. It arose from the watch, and told that they had been surprised. Neal sat up, staring about him. To the right the Frenchman was rubbing his eyes. To the left the Indians were all upon their feet. They looked in one direction; not towards the opening in the woods; not whence the new arrivals were to proceed. Neal saw that they looked at him.

He threw a startled glance along the company. Another band of natives had joined them while

they slept, and the clearing was crowded with armed men. Back into the forest, farther than the sight could penetrate, there fell the pitpat of their moccasined feet stealing through the bushes. A gorgeously dressed figure headed them, — a French officer. Beside him stalked another man. He was the Black Gown.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BATTLE OF SILVER WATER

"Whenever you hear of a good war, go to it." — Sir Philip Sidney.

Now Neal gave up all pretense. This contingency, so remote that it appeared the least to be considered, had still been faced. He guessed the many differences between himself and the Black Gown might be detected, no less than their likeness to each other; he had feared scarcely at all that he should be brought to confront the Jesuit. If such misfortune did occur, he told himself at the start, there was no loophole of escape.

No loophole save one, and that was desperate, and depended entirely upon the priest. He might call the Dutchman his brother, as had been done once to save himself. Still, the Canadians possibly could detect the fraud, while, were the assertion made, it must emanate from him. Neal regarded him swiftly, closely. The dark face did not change. There was no hint of recognition, — nothing more than surprise and mild interest marked Père Daubiny's manner.

So it was hopeless.

Neal made an involuntary gesture that the man whose blanket he had shared, during the night,

mistook for an effort to flee. His fingers clutched his sword. The other laughed dismally.

"Of what avail?" said he.

"That is true. So you acknowledge the cheat? You surrender?"

"Again I ask, of what avail for me to resist such odds?"

The Frenchman bowed. "None at all."

The Indians conferred aside, while they openly compared Neal with the true priest. The resemblance was remarkable enough to affect them as supernatural. The Black Gown remained passive, but his comrade strode forward.

"What is this?" he demanded, breaking a pause of sheer wonder. "Who is this masquerading as the good father? He is no priest of ours."

"I thought it bordered on the miraculous," replied the man whom he addressed, "that I should leave the Black Gown with you, and yet find him here three miles away. This, my captain, is a spy, I take it, from the camp at St. Sacrament."

Neal silenced the shout with which the announcement was received. "I am no spy. I was on my way to Fort Edward, to warn our men of your approach; that is the utmost that can be charged against me. I put on this dress to aid my undertaking. But, indeed, I am no spy."

"Henceforth," retorted the officer, with a catlike grin, "you are no more nor less than our captive. That is sufficient for us. I fancy, by the time we have closed our interview, my good friend, it may be sufficient for you."

"Go on," Neal answered; "I ask nothing of you."

"Not mercy?"

"Certainly not mercy."

The two Frenchmen spoke apart, the Black Gown approaching as if to take his share in the conversation. Evidently they were belated. Neal heard the priest advise: "Place him under guard, and give him to me to watch. It is my due, for he has insulted my holy office. Give the fellow to me."

The others agreed. They ordered their followers to fall into line, — that stealthy Indian file through the forest, — and deputed two of them to bind Neal, leading him between them.

"I shall follow," said the Black Gown.

The men passed, one by one, while the savages were securing Neal, tying his crossed wrists together and then to their own arms.

"Step one side, and fall in behind," directed Père Daubiny, "or we shall retard our friends."

They obeyed him, and the troops swept on. When some fifty men had gone by, the way was clear. The natives dragged Neal forward, the priest close at their heels. "Come, thou dog," said one, and the other hit the captive with his musket.

It was difficult traveling three abreast, Neal hampered in his movements, and the man behind him always so near that his mere presence urged them on like a lash. The cord sawed into his flesh; his arms were jerked in their sockets by the swinging trot of his captors, who did not keep step,

and flung him from side to side in his efforts to march with both. His head began to swim, his eyes were bloodshot and blurred. The breath tore up from his breast in a groan.

There came a crashing sound, a strange daze, a force that pulled Neal to the left. He felt as if his bleeding hands were torn from him. Another blow descended. He was thrown to the right. Thereupon he pitched forward, falling his full length upon the ground.

Some one rolled him over on to his back. It was the Black Gown. He cut the cords, working rapidly, impatiently. Neal smiled up at him.

"You did remember," said he.

"Could I forget?"

He assisted the young man to his feet. "Throw away that foolish dress," he commanded. "Put on the furs of one of these savages."

"Why?" asked Neal, still stupid from the effects of his fall.

"Don't stop to parley. Do as I tell you."

He tore off the improvised soutane, and brought Neal the winter garb of a Canadian native. "Happily thou and I are not unlike these redmen," he observed.

They hurried on the new disguise. Then Neal seized the priest's hands and kissed them. "May the Lord reward you for this you have done," he cried.

"Yes, yes, brother. You see it was my turn. And you must not linger; make haste away. I follow my people's steps."

"How shall you account" —

"There is other work laid out for to-day than any account of mine. And who knows what the night may bring? The one thing that concerns me is your immediate flight."

In spite of this haste to be rid of Neal, he paused to give his blessing to the heretic, after which they parted, and Neal disappeared in the woods.

He struck out at a right angle to the path of the French army, trusting thus to elude their forces, possibly arriving first at the camp. He soon discovered how futile was this hope.

On in advance he began to see one man and then another also to the right. He could not penetrate beyond their line. It spread, and he understood the purpose. They were preparing an ambuscade. He stumbled upon a swamp to whose borders the forces reached. Skirting the quagmire, dodging from tree to tree, unnoticed in his resemblance to one of themselves, he advanced in the like covert fashion, and still more rapidly.

Presently there was brought to him the march of many feet. They advanced along the road that led from the camp by the lake. There was one horse among them. Neal made a dash from the shelter of the dense underbrush on the border of the swamp. Straightway he encountered King Hendrick riding close to Colonel Ephraim Williams, who was on foot. They led twelve hundred men.

At sunrise this force had been dispatched from Lake George to meet the enemy. The old sachem

was the only man who disapproved of their action. Holding up a number of twigs he said: "United they are strong. Singly — see — they may be broken. Let us wait for the foe together. We whom you would send out are too many to be killed; also, we are too few to fight."

He was voted down and put to silence. In the September dawn, Williams and he led forth their followers, natives and provincials, to meet the warriors of Louis XIV. When Neal sprang from the thicket, under the very nose of Hendrick's horse, he was saluted by the muzzles of a hundred guns. Every man in sight was prepared to shoot him down, and only hesitated for orders. "A friend," he gasped. Then to Hendrick: "Say you know me. It is Cornelis Sleight."

His appearance distracted attention from a sound like that of their marching men, but ahead of them.

At the same instant a single savage strode from the forest and faced the provincials. He struck an attitude of defiance. "Whence come you?" he demanded of the sachem.

"From the Mohawks," answered Hendrick. "And you?"

"From Montreal."

He fired upon the old man.

It was the signal for a general assault. The wood blazed with guns, the echo of musketry reverberating from the rocks. The long, curving line had closed in upon Williams's men. On either side, in front and from the rear, they were shot

down under a storm of bullets. Hendrick pitched from his horse, dead. Ephraim Williams fell forward, dead. Many another soldier dropped as he fired in a last defiance. Nathan Whiting saw that in this awful hour he had been advanced to the command. He shouted orders for a retreat.

Neal ran after him, darting from tree to tree with the others. The French regulars advanced upon them in an orderly body, Canadians and Indians adopting their tactics of a covered flight. After this manner they advanced to the camp. Here defenses were in course of construction, begun after Williams's departure. When the noise of the attack in the woods came to them, the cannon were dragged from the shore, to be placed behind a breastwork of trees chopped in frantic haste. At a body of water known after that day's fight as the Bloody Pond, the fugitives were met by Lieutenant-Colonel Cole with three hundred men. These served to retard the French while the English struggled on to Lake George.

Neal threw himself upon the fortification among scores of other men who were helped to surmount the heaped-up wagons and spreading branches. Dieskau and his troops pressed hard upon these fugitives, hoping to penetrate the encampment on the wave which swept them into port. But the Indians recoiled at sight of the cannon. Once more they and the Canadians sought refuge behind the trees, while the regulars proceeded boldly forward. One hundred and fifty yards from the camp they opened fire by platoons. Johnson's men were

stationed inside their abattis. From this protection a destructive fire cut down the Frenchman's forces, and the three cannon thundered.

Neal made his way onward till he reached Johnson's side. It was no time for greeting, yet the two men exchanged a smile. "That 's good," said the general simply.

With the words he clasped one hand against his hip and fell.

Neal flung himself on his leader's body, searching, the trickling blood for a guide, to find where he had been hurt. The heart beat. He was not killed. After a little Neal decided, "He is not seriously wounded," and carried the fainting man to a sheltered spot. For himself, he pushed back into the fight.

General Phinehas Lyman, succeeding to the command by the withdrawal of Johnson, was urging on his men. The French retreated, and he yelled to the colonists to follow.

Over the breastwork they plunged, using their muskets as clubs to attack the enemy hand to hand. Dieskau sat on a stump exposed to the cannon fire, streaming with blood from many wounds, yet endeavoring to cheer on his troops, whose sole remaining thought was safety. His courage could not inspire them. He was left behind as they took to their heels and fled pell-mell from the battle of Lake George.

Neal had been shot through the ankle, but in the mad joy of combat, he paid no heed to the wound. Lyman was in hot pursuit of the enemy, when a

messenger tore through the brushwood. As he passed on his way to the general, — and that meant at the head of the attacking party, — he was calling out his orders, seeking distractedly for attention. A comrade, shoulder to shoulder with Neal in their pursuit, repeated the words as if he were the only one who had heard them. Absorbed though they might be in their fierce purpose, every man knew what was said. Johnson had summoned them. They were to give up the charge.

Lyman wheeled his men about with sullen face, muttering curses beneath his breath. That night his fury and his followers' fury deepened at the news which came to them from Fort Edward. Two hundred troops had been sent out from thence, and had Lyman worked his will, the French must have been captured between the jaws of the coupled forces. The army was in their hands and escaped, complained the men at Lake George.

Meanwhile Cornelis Sleight tossed upon his blanket in a delirium of fever, contracted by exposure, exertion, and a neglected wound. He knew nothing of what took place around him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BLOODY POND

— "The night at length when thou,
O prayer found vain, didst fall from out my prayers."
DANTE ROSSETTI.

ALTHOUGH Cecil Loveland had merely accepted Johnson's escort thus far on his journey to La Presentation, although he held aloof in derision of the provincials' campaign, when a battle was precipitated, its contagion attacked him. He was no coward, and he became intoxicated by the love of fight latent in every being, beast or human. He volunteered in the reinforcement sent out with Colonel Cole. As they defiled through the woods, Cecil found to his disgust that he was treading the narrow path of their progress between Pedrom Tyssen and Lubert Van Bergen. To and fro across him went question and reply, surmise and fret, that Neal Sleight was not with them, nor the cause of his absence known.

To Cecil, the loyalty of these young men was beyond comprehension, since he could not understand what a company implied. He attributed their feeling to a personal devotion, setting his teeth together while their subdued comments went on. It was his old cry, almost of despair, — Was

there no other man in the world? Their wild guessing as to Neal's movements recalled that scene last night, when the mock Black Gown quitted the general's tent. The message to his cousin brought with it a remembrance which whitened his cheek with rage. He went over, as if he read them from a book, word by word of the talk with Eve that night in July, as they drove home from the Pasture. He had examined her impatiently in regard to Neal's information. She flung him an answer, and then, goaded on by mortification, disappointment, and jealousy, she burst into weak tears and upbraiding of herself, of her one-time lover, and of fate; most of all, of her husband. Under the shield of dusk, which is apt to lead to confidences, the young couple spoke irrevocable truths, and those falsehoods with a specious look that hack and hew at the soul. Eve did not possess the power of loving deeply. She made her husband believe the force lay in her nature only to have been called forth by Cornelis Sleight. When, in an effeminate shriek, he bade her go to the Dutch fool, and called it a good riddance, she threw the last dart in her quiver.

"He would not take me," Eve sobbed. "He has no eyes for any woman except your cousin. Or it may be the Pasture that allures; however that is, he will choose Annetje Kierstiede, if he does choose, and she is ready."

Through her surrender of womanly pride, through her hopelessness, Eve presented a piteous spectacle to one who judged broadly or impersonally. She

and what she said drove Cecil beside himself. He resented Neal's contempt for his wife. It cheapened her. It gave him the baffled sense of having been tricked to learn that, after he had triumphed over another man, the victim laughed at his pains, and went in gay unconcern on his way to better things. For Cecil was not so blinded but he recognized the difference between Annetje and Eve. He had been repelled by the one, and, from a child, the other fascinated him. Still, he could stand apart from his fancy, viewing the two, not as they were to him, but in themselves. And there he despised the man who chose Eve Verbeeck. Moreover, the Kierstiede grant remained; he swore to himself that summer night as they drove to Albany, and again this September morning while he marched through the woods from the lake, that to see Neal lord of the Pasture, Annetje's husband, Lady Anne's favorite, — that was beyond endurance. He caught himself up with a groan on the further reflection, — And what then? Is it the signal for the torture's end when one cries out that life has grown beyond endurance?

His brain was in this whirl of mad memories and mad plans as they emerged upon the deep sheet of water, and the noise of flight came to them. They saw Ephraim Williams had been overcome. Out from the forest dashed Cole's three hundred men, eager for redress, frenzied by the thought of that unequal battle in the woods. On the banks of the pond they met their own troops, and surrounding them were the French.

Cecil fought like a tiger. In his highly wrought state he paid no heed to what went on about him, but, his eyes shining insanely, and lips set in a foolish grin, he struck down the enemy and did savage execution. It was a joy to shed blood, to inflict pain, to concentrate the malignity which consumed him.

In the conflict he had pushed on recklessly until, by the time he came to himself, he stood on the water's brink in a group of Mohawks, those few who had saved themselves after their sachem fell. They clustered about — something; Cecil neither saw nor cared what it was. He engaged in combat with a great Canadian like the giant Goliath, and, like David, he was victorious, refusing the aid the Indians offered him. Their praise was comforting to his sore spirit. He smiled, wiping the dead man's blood from his sword.

"Master," said one of the savages, "whom, think you, we have here?" He pointed to the group and the something it concealed. "Our king is fallen, yet we have taken what would have made his heart rejoice."

"And what is that?" asked Cecil good-humoredly.

"The Black Gown."

Cecil fell to trembling. The man had often met that sort of fright on a battlefield, although never among his own people. He considered it natural, and that this late hour in the day was a fitting time for its manifestation. He entertained a lofty scorn for the white men's bodies. Their minds

were another thing. "Master, what shall we do with our prize?" he inquired.

"Kill him," said Cecil.

He looked over his shoulder. Had he spoken? It did not seem to him that his lips parted. But was there another white man here? Where were the fools who had talked, as they came through the woods, of Neal, Neal, Neal, — always that talk of Neal?

There was no white man here. None except the Frenchman whose breast he had pierced, none except the figure in the group of Indians. And he kept aloof from them. He saw the soutane between the half-naked bodies; he distinguished the head rising level with those dancing scalp-locks and waving feathers. He should stand at a distance. He had not taken this man; he had not so much as seen him face to face. So he could swear, were he put upon his oath, although that could never come to pass. This was the Indians' work from the first; it should be to the last. Were he implicated, by any chance, what was the accusation of a savage against the solemn vow of his majesty's officer? He had not seen the man.

All this traversed his brain with the swiftness and strength of lightning. The Mohawk hesitated. "If he were our prisoner, we might torture him," he hinted with a leer.

"The white sachem would forbid it." This was Cecil's voice, for it came hard. "His men will rob you of him, if you do not make haste. Kill him, and — and throw his body into the pond."

A corpse floated by on the softly lapping waves, and suggested to him a furtherance of this scheme. Neal Sleight should disappear, in leaving Johnson's camp. None should know, while all might guess, his fate.

The Mohawk recognized the value of the little officer's advice. He returned to his friends, with whom he conferred, the tall figure standing proudly by, waiting to learn its doom. Cecil watched them, his lips parted, his eyes protruding, his back turned on the battlefield. His whole being was absorbed in what might come. He saw a savage reach for his knife. So it was to be? He saw it rise in the long red hand. It glittered through the air, falling straight out from the owner's shoulder.

"That was a fine stroke," commented Cecil. "That went to the heart."

The tall figure shook like a tree where the axe has given a final blow. It wavered for a second, and went down. It disappeared among the Indians. The Black Gown was dead.

They lifted the body in their naked arms. "It requires four men to be his pall-bearers," said Cecil in his throat. He broke into a titter. To his amazement, he found that tears were trickling down his face. "It has unnerved me," he concluded, and began to curse. "Yet I am glad! I am glad! I should do it over again."

Such was the burial service above a man who had given his life in Cecil Loveland's behalf, who died at Cecil's command. The Indians bore him into the water, wading out knee deep to cast the

body from them. It sank in the Bloody Pond. A sudden nausea seized upon Cecil. What if Neal's corpse should rise and float by him, as the Frenchman had done but now? What if the beautiful white face, — a silly notion possessed him of how beautiful it must be in the majesty of death, — what if the face appeared, and the wide-open eyes gazed up and met his own? Two hands struck his shoulders. He jumped, crying out: "It was not I."

A Frenchman answered. At his statement, "You are my captive," Cecil's heart leaped, for very lightness, in his breast. To be prisoner of war was nothing, if he escaped being made prisoner by his friends. His assailants were astonished at the tame surrender. He made no protest, while they secured him in a secret place in the forest before they pushed on, after Dieskau, to Lake George. He appreciated his situation. He realized that the men who had tied him to the tree, pointing muskets at his head, might both be killed, and he never released from bondage. He might die in the wilderness, of thirst and hunger, like a trapped animal, his bones dangling in their leash, till the woods were swept away by the axe of the pioneer.

And yet, could he help himself, he would not. It were better to assume such risks through which the French carried him, far from Neal's friends and the possibility of revenge. The sun found him out in his retreat. It touched his uplifted face, flickering across his eyes, scorching his lips,

panting for a sip of water. As it fell ever so slightly to the westward, the sound that a soldier detects in the remotest distance was borne to Cecil. Men were fleeing through the woods. Either Johnson's defense was proven too weak, — and that well might be, — or he had repulsed the trained warriors of France. It meant life or death to Cecil, and he waited.

Hasty feet left the roadway, crashing through the underbrush. The men who had come upon him unawares at the pond now appeared. Along the path there continued the stumbling, headlong flight of an army. The French were defeated. "The fools" had justified their boast.

As his captors cut the cords, dragging him on between them, one spoke to the other : —

"Did you see the spy, he who wore the black gown, fighting there at the fort?"

"See him?" was the snarling retort. "'T was he who clubbed me over the forehead. I swore at him, and asked how he was rid of the true Black Gown. He only laughed. Afterwards, you shot him. I am sure you were the man."

"So am I," the first grimly responded. "And I, too, spoke with the fellow before I fired. He is a reckless devil. I hope — I believe, I gave him his death-blow."

Their prisoner pounced on the assertion.

"Hush!" he cried. "Listen to me! What is all this about Black Gowns and black gowns? The spy is dead. I saw him die. He was buried in yonder pond."

"Then his ghost gave me my wound," retorted the Frenchman, tightening the scarf about his head. "If you speak the truth, tell us what you mean by saying a priest was killed beside the pond."

"I mean," Cecil repeated doggedly, "he *was* killed. He is dead, — the spy dressed like a priest."

"'T is false. That is, 't is false he died then. We prove it, for we talked with the spy after you and we had left the pond. I don't deny he may have departed this life by now. He pitched over on his face, and I can testify he was shot."

"Yes, yes," clamored Cecil. "That sounds reasonable, does n't it? Surely the man is killed. But — my head is so confused — I tell you I saw him die."

"You have the courage of your convictions. I begin to fear we may both be right. What if" — to his friend — "it were the true Black Gown who was slain at the pond?"

"There was but one," urged Cecil, in his shrillest feminine tone.

"We had a priest with us, when we met the disguised man in the forest, — the provincial we two fell in with afterwards at St. Sacrament. That fact speaks for itself. And now tell me of our Black Gown; at whose hands has he met his death?"

There was no answer. Upon Cecil had fallen the bitterest realization man can know, — that he had committed a purposeless sin.

Their retreat soon resolved itself into a disorderly rout. It were easy for Cecil to effect his escape, had he such desire. But he was carried towards the north and La Presentation. He postponed flight until the mission should be nearer at hand. Finally he discovered that he put off his purpose too long. They joined other troops, by whom he was more securely guarded, and breaking away became impracticable. Winter descended, a northern winter, in which he could do nothing. He set forward his time of freedom, waiting with what patience he could muster, for the spring. The longer, warmer days brought his opportunity.

One April morning there limped through the gateway of La Presentation a ragged, dirty man, starving and penniless. The British uniform was worn to dun-colored tatters. He gave no sign of a formidable foe, and, on begging to see the abbé, was admitted without parley.

Many strange folk came to the father. He listened tranquilly to Cecil's narrative. "I was sure you would know," the young officer ended. "Where shall I go to look for Toinette Valot?"

Abbé Picquet smiled sadly. "It is my office to point out the road, and yet — dear friend, the Lord has taken her. Antoinette is dead."

"Dead?" repeated Cecil. He seemed to shrivel, and grow old, under the eyes of the priest.

The latter went on in a pitying voice: "She left a secret — I do not know of what nature — in the charge of Père Daubiny. It concerned persons in

Albany, — he told me that, — and he carried her message to the south."

"Then" —

"Wait, my child. Alas! Père Daubiny, likewise, is dead."

Cecil stamped his foot. "This is a plot!" he shrieked. "This is a clumsy plot! How could everybody be dead?"

The abbé took a pinch of snuff, and waited for his rage to flare out into quiet. "Père Daubiny was killed," said he, "at the battle of St. Sacrament. So I have learned of late."

Cecil threw back his head, giving a hollow cackle. "I can explain that." He stammered in his earnestness. "There was another man — he was a spy — who wore a priest's soutane. He was wounded at St. Sacrament. And he died from the wound, you say?"

"I do not mean that man," returned the abbé. "I have heard about the spy. But Père Daubiny fell at the Bloody Pond."

Cecil bent forward on his seat, thrusting out his sharp little face like a knife. His mouth opened and closed. He could not speak.

"The Mohawks are very proud of what they have done," continued the abbé slowly. "They made certain that we should hear. Their boast is this: they captured the Black Gown, and would have put him to the torture, had not an English officer interfered. He told them, they say, to kill and be done with it, or the father might be delivered out of their hands. They obeyed. They struck

down our saint with their hunting-knives. He was buried in the pond. Tell me, since you know something of this, can there be room for doubt? Were there regulars at St. Sacrament, despite the provincials' boast that 't was they who won the battle?"

Still Cecil moistened his lips with his tongue, still he tried to speak, and gasps came from his burning throat. At length he answered wearily, his voice, too, become old and quavering: "I was mistaken. The story is true. There was one regular at St. Sacrament, and at the Bloody Pond. A priest was killed. I saw him. I was not aware — I beg you pardon my rudeness — I was not aware who it was."

The abbé shrugged away this apology. "I fear," he ventured, "the message rests with the messenger. The secret you would learn has sunk to the bottom of that awful pond."

Cecil nodded his head, and continued to nod, like a mechanical toy. "I guessed as much," said he. "I guessed as much."

With that he appeared to slide down into his clothes. They tumbled from his chair. He lay, a miserable, shrunken heap, fainting on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIX

NEAL'S SECOND CHANCE

"There is no antidote against the opium of time." — SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

NEAL wakened from a troubled sleep to find Teunis Schemerhorn bending over him. "Did they run?" he asked.

Teunis leaned closer. He gathered the great fellow into his arms, grinning ecstatically. "They ran like rabbits."

"So we got the best of them? I fancied" —

Teunis's voice rose to an exultant roar. "'The fools' won the battle. Neal, we showed the king and his ministers we have outgrown leading-strings. Henceforth we should command respect."

"Fools though we are?"

"And not such perfect fools as they imagined. There was another engagement at Rocky Brook. Captain MacGinnis and a detachment from the fort fell on the fugitives, capturing their ammunition and baggage. We routed them utterly. We have gained the first true victory over the French; that at Beau Sejour was mere child's play."

Neal hearkened eagerly to these details, yet he had a chieftain's care for his clan. "And the company?" he inquired. "Did the boys all come out of it unhurt?"

"Our loss has been severe," said Teunis, his round face sobering, — "our personal loss, I mean. To-day the general is mourning Captain MacGinnis's death from a wound received at Rocky Brook. The camp bewails King Hendrick and Williams, and — but those men are not so much to you and me, albeit they were officers. Jasper is gone, Neal, and Eve Verbeeck's husband."

"Oh, not Jasper!"

"They fell in the engagement at the pond," Teunis continued, regarding him attentively. "Their bodies lie under its waters. But," savagely, "there is many a Frenchman to bear them company. That is my consolation."

"It is hard for me," Neal acknowledged, "to be consoled for Jasper's loss."

"And Eve. I am sorry for Eve."

Privately Neal was doubtful whether Eve would feel much sorrow for herself. Teunis considered his attitude rather harsh. "I hope he won't go back to her," he said to himself. "Albertse would be so angry if he did."

At all events, Neal seemed willing to be diverted. He inquired what was next to be done, whereupon Teunis reluctantly confessed the future did not promise to rival this brilliant past. "The general has been anxious to see you," he concluded, in tones of relief. "I will leave it for him to tell you during his visit."

Johnson proved nothing loath to discuss his plans, acknowledging he knew there was discontent at Fort Edward and in the camp because he

did not pursue their victory by the occupation of Ticonderoga and the attack upon Crown Point. "They fail to explain," he said, "how that shall be achieved without means of transporting our rations and ammunition. If the grumblers could counteract a detestation of the military power which affects the country; if they could induce the settlers to bring out their horses and wagons from hiding; if they could keep those we have secured from disappearing daily, then I might do all they ask. As it is, my hands are tied."

He was at present employing his men in strengthening their position, by raising a stockade fort at the south of the lake, one which he called Fort William Henry. He informed Neal that this and Fort Edward were to be garrisoned while the other troops returned to Albany.

"You must make haste to recover," said the general kindly. "There are fair hands waiting, at Beverwyck, and holding your wreath of laurel."

"Thank you, sir," Neal answered in a shy murmur.

Even with this inducement, he did not improve. His wound had been neglected and misused. The payment for his folly came when he found the spirit on fire to follow Schuyler to Albany, the body so weak that he must be left behind. There was nothing for it but to spend the winter at the fort.

That tedious period of inaction wore itself out in a silence where Neal began to feel as if all his friends might be dead and buried with Jasper

Douw. He heard nothing from the world outside the fort. With the spring, however, news traveled to them across the still snow-covered country. General Johnson had been awarded £5000 and a baronetcy, for his share in the battle of Lake George. "So they acknowledge the importance of our victory," the men exulted together.

It had been a hardship — not the greatest — of Neal's invalidism that he missed carrying the glorification of their deed to the sympathy of Albany. That triumph roused the boyish spirit which lay latent in him. It was painful to see it evaporate, little by little, under the monotony of garrison life in winter. In all the soldiers, perhaps, the feeling revived with scorn of the inefficiency, the blunders which ensued upon the home government's fresh interference. "The measures of defense" carried on during the past year were given their proper name in May, in England's declaration of war. Governor Shirley was removed from command, being succeeded by that dictatorial, tactless, phenomenally incapable person, the Earl of Loudoun. All dealings with the natives remained in Johnson's charge, — the one wise move of the campaign. General Abercrombie was leisurely proceeding up the Hudson when this intelligence came to Fort William Henry. It was rumored that he intended to strengthen Albany by a stockade and a ditch.

"But 't is the old tale of delays and mistaken efforts," said the provincials, priding themselves on their own achievement. They criticised the

more freely the government; they nourished the more resentment against the contempt their efforts had evoked. It required no prophet to tell whither the country tended. The first stand for American independence was taken in 1755. It was called the battle of Lake George.

Early in June Neal was summoned before the commandant. "I have good news for you, Sleight," he announced. "I must send a packet to the Fuyck, and I am directed to employ you as my messenger" (he shot a searching glance at the young man), — "do you know why?"

"Why my name was mentioned, sir? No, I have not the slightest idea."

"You are lucky in some stanch friends," was the officer's reply. "However, it is not necessary for you nor me to understand our orders. Prepare to start. My packet shall be signed and sealed by the time you go, — not like Lord Loudoun's," he finished, as if to himself. Yet there was a sly smile towards Neal.

Neal raised his brows to signify his comprehension. Already anecdotes were afloat of the procrastination ruling at New York.

It was a very gay young soldier who traveled in that sweet summer weather out of the tedium of the lake country and towards home. He thought of the contrast between his hopes eighteen months ago on a like journey and his anticipations now. With the injustice of a lover, he told himself that this was the difference between a return to Eve and to Annetje.

The Pasture lay not far from his path. It was hard to pass the cross-road leading to its gate, yet he felt that after his visit to the fort, duty demanded he should next seek his father and Maria. He no longer considered how this might bring about a meeting with Eve Loveland. He only remembered it postponed a meeting with Annetje.

He entered the city by the north road from the mills, each sight becoming henceforth significant and dear. He must go by the door of his home, where he could not pause. He trusted no one might see him, in this belief overlooking the amicable ordeal to which a wayfarer was subjected on a summer night in Albany. Every stoop was occupied. Men with their pipes, women over their knitting, boys and girls a-wooing, kept a sharp lookout upon the passers-by, who must acknowledge the greetings, or be rated unpardonably ignorant in local etiquette. Thus from house to house Neal was saluted with persistent demands that he stop for a friendly gossip. His excuse repeated itself to absurdity. He could make out the ensign of the commander of royal arms floating above the fort. He pressed on towards that goal. If only Maria might not see him!

He came in sight of the Sleight homestead. Yes, there was the usual gathering at the front entrance, and, in the green side yard, the slaves were assembled. He could not escape. As his figure drew near, advancing at its swiftest strides, a cry rang out to meet him. "That was Maria," thought Neal.

A portly form sped like a sylph across the grass. It flung itself against the gate, and skimmed over the walk up the street. "My own pretty boy! my own pretty boy!" screamed his mammy.

While Neal repaid her caresses with less noise but equal ardor, another woman ran down the steps from the stoop. She was little and slight and graceful, dressed in heavy black. Pieter Sleight followed her. "It *is* Neal," called Eve's voice.

Maria held her foster-son the closer at the sound. "Don't you speak to her, Master Neal," she whispered in his ear.

Neal laughed at this, giving her black cheek another kiss before he raised his head. Then he advanced to the others, took Eve's hand, and dropped it quickly to go on to his father. Once more he explained his position. "In an hour's time, doubtless, I shall be at liberty," he continued. "Will you wait for me, sir? Will you wait, Maria?"

"Yes," said Eve.

Though the hour had passed by the time he came back up the north road, the family were still on the stoop, the negroes by the gate. Now Eve advanced first to meet him. "This is our Neal at last," she announced, sliding one hand up through his arm.

Neal felt the dismay of a gentleman to whom an unloved woman makes love. Modest as he was, he grasped Eve's meaning. She was playing a bold game, but then, she understood him — at least, as he used to be. She defied their last con-

versation. She intended to sweep him on to the old ground where she had left him, and where she assumed that he remained. He should see how she blotted the past year and a half from existence. He knew her to be Cecil's widow. He must know as well that she was willing to become the wife of Cornelis Sleight.

"I don't feel as if I were myself at all," he replied. "Is my father there? Maria, Prince, come here. I want every one to hear of my good fortune." He raised his voice from the sentimental key Eve struck, summoning the household to the steps. He stood among them, looking away from Mrs. Loveland, close at his side, to watch the light which he should kindle in those others' eyes. "Sir William Johnson has been my unfailing friend," said Neal. "He over-represented some service of mine at the lake. Guess what was the result."

"You are promoted!" cried Eve and Vrouw Sleight in a breath.

"They have given me a patent for 1300 acres of land. I am a rich man, father; congratulate me."

Old Pieter and his wife exclaimed rapturously. The slaves capered for happiness.

Eve gazed up at Neal. "I do rejoice for you," she said.

"I rejoice for myself," he answered, in an undertone whose every word was clear-cut. "I am still far beneath Annetje Kierstiede, because she is a woman and I am only a man. Still, this does

lessen other differences between us. No one can call me mercenary when I ask her to marry me."

He felt as if he struck Eve — so little, so childish, so appealing — full in her quivering face. On the other hand, in decency, he was obliged to tell her. He could not leave her to further betrayal, even to his merciful eyes alone. She must understand.

Eve dropped his arm. She seated herself on the step. "Yes, all you wish is in your power now," she remarked after a moment. "You are lucky, Neal, but that you always were. Everything came, as if by right, to you."

"Everything did not stay," he answered. "But we must reckon on such losses in life, and I am a grateful man for what remains, — God knows how grateful. By the way, Maria," — turning to his nurse, — "may I have my old room to-night?"

At the question Vrouw Sleight would have offered him her guest-chamber, had not the autocratic housekeeper interfered. "He shall sleep in his own box-bed," she decreed. "But, tell me, Master Neal, — if nobody else will ask, — is your wound healed? Are you quite well again?"

"Have I not proved it," he answered, "if I travel the seventy miles from the fort to the Fuyck? And yet I am tired, I confess. I should be glad to see my own room and the box-bed in the corner."

Eve heard more than was said. Neal felt impatient for the morrow and a further journey — and Annetje.

CHAPTER XXX

THE HEIRESS OF THE PASTURE

"Love, thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady, thou leadest me to summer clime."

KEATS.

MARY LOVELAND was waiting upon Lady Anne with a new-born assiduity. Now that Cecil was dead, she thought, and the patent was lost to them, it behooved her to seek favor from the rich old despot who might redeem or spoil her future. My lady accepted her attentions with a grim little smile, making no comments. Sometimes Mary fancied she detected an expression almost like compassion in the satiric lines of the shriveled face.

While she was adjusting the pillows, and straightening the covers of the couch, a door flew open. Annetje hastened into the room.

"What is it?" demanded Mary.

"Why — nothing." The mistress of the Pasture paused. One hand went up to her throat, as if the breath caught there, and she could not speak. "I came to tell you, Pomp has been to the Fuyck. He says Neal Sleight is at home."

Mary dropped the cushion she was patting into shape. "Ah!" said she deliberately. "In that case, he will be here to see me some time to-day."

Annetje's eyes flashed out to meet and hold her own. The cousins confronted each other, speechless, neither willing to break that silence.

It was Lady Anne who exclaimed: "Heyday! To see you, forsooth! What do you intend us to understand by that?"

Thus brought to bay, Mary turned on them both, Annetje in her haughty silence, my lady with her inquisitive smile. "You are to understand whatsoever you please," said she. "I should not have spoken as I did, save under the excitement of these tidings. However, I do believe Cornelis Sleight will wish to visit me at once. Is that sufficiently clear?"

Annetje stooped to pick an imaginary thread from the Turkey rug. She left all cross-examination to my lady, who was equal to it.

"No, it is not sufficiently clear," the sick woman replied. "I prefer everything put beyond dispute. Has he declared himself?"

Mary hesitated, debating how far she dared go. Neal's parting from her — since he was Neal, and not a man of her London world — gave her assurance.

"Yes," she said.

There was a moment's pause.

"You are a very fortunate woman," Annetje observed. "And now, Cousin Anne, it is time for you to take your drops."

She stood by the little stand, trickling them from the bottle with a hand that would not shake, for Mary was watching her. Afterwards she went

away, — not to her own room. Mary might think she was crying there, if she heard that door close behind her. She walked slowly down the stairway, her head still high, her glance straight before her. "I have not flinched," she said to herself.

Quick steps and the sweep of a silken gown across the polished floor were brought to Annetje from the upper hall. "She could, at least, leave me alone," commented the girl. To her dismay, a sob rose in her throat. She stifled it angrily; that must not be. Glancing over her shoulder, she smiled at Mary.

"Neal is coming!" cried her cousin in unwonted vivacity. "I saw him from Aunt Anne's window. I recognized his horse. I could always recognize that horse of his."

She spoke fast and foolishly, running out to the stoop. "I said he would come at once," she called back gayly.

Annetje lingered at the foot of the stairs. She should go, in a moment, — go on to the north parlor, and so out of Mary's sight, away from their meeting. Words from the church service came to her, as she waited, one hand on the newel-post: "Oh, spare me a little, that I may recover my strength before I go hence and be no more seen."

To learn that Neal was coming — was close at hand — had made her tremble and grow faint. She would not stir, not until she could walk with dignity, unfaltering, from Mary's presence.

But Neal was impatient. He spurred the horse Mary always could recognize till it struck a frantic

gallop. He tore along the oak avenue at racing speed.

Mary stood on the steps. "Welcome home!" she called.

He swung from his saddle, and ran towards her. He caught her hands in his and kissed them. "Ah, but I am glad to be here!" he said.

Annetje forgot her composure, forgot all things, in the instinct for escape. She fled to the open door of the north parlor, and Neal heard her. He brushed past Mary, taking one long stride into the house. So he was brought face to face with the juffrouw.

She was quivering, white, and breathing fast. She gave him one swift glance that seemed to plead for mercy. He did not heed her look, nor her attitude. It was enough that he was with her, the one woman in his world. During the journey from the fort, he had arranged many versions of his courtship, — in what persuasive phrases he should tell his love. He stood on the threshold, enveloping her in a rapturous gaze.

"Dear!" he said.

Annetje's stiff, cold hands flew up to her heart, and clasped above it. Her eyes searched his. He drew nearer where she faltered in the open door of her refuge.

"Dear!" he said again.

And then they were in each other's arms.

There came once more the sharp, restless swish of a woman's skirts across the floor. It was the same sound that had maddened Annetje in the

minute which divided misery from joy. Neal heard nothing. The girl knew Mary had followed and was there, in the summer parlor, staring with incredulous eyes.

She drew back from him so decidedly that, perforce, he too raised his head. Mary did not speak.

Neal seized Annetje's fingers tightly in his. He led her to her cousin. "You will share our happiness, I know that of old," said he. "Dear Miss Loveland, you have been like a mother to me."

God be praised, there is seldom a man so mean as to glory in the sight of another's downfall. He may anticipate it. He may reason it to be just. He may even rejoice that it has come. Our brotherhood is yet proved in the truth of our shame before those who are ashamed. Annetje shrank from her lover's hold. Hiding her face in her hands, she ran away into the north parlor.

Neal gazed after her with a little, rapturous laugh. Then he looked back at Mary. He did not think it strange she said nothing, because he did not think of her at all. "What shall I do?" he queried helplessly, and still smiling. "I don't understand women, you know. Have I frightened her? Would she like to be alone? I want to please her in everything. Does she wish to be alone, or shall I follow her?"

"She wishes you to follow her," said Mary.

Neal went to the north parlor and closed the door. It was Mary whom he left alone.

By and by Annetje conducted her lover out to

that southern porch where the invalid was sunning herself. "Look who has come to see you," she announced.

The beadlike eyes sparkled wisely. They read the face of man and maid, and my lady chuckled. She pinched Annetje's ear, as the girl stooped to kiss her withered cheek, from sheer joy that must be shared.

"Not to see me," said Lady Anne, "nor Mary, nor the house where he once lived. I know!"

"You are right," Neal confessed. "My one desire, since I left her, has been to meet her again. I have told her so."

"He has told me nothing," Annetje declared, laughing hysterically. "Not a word of all that has happened in this long year of our separation."

"I should judge he had made something plain," her cousin remarked; "and all beside is unimportant."

"Yes, she understands that," said Neal, stationing himself where he could look and look at Annetje behind the tall-backed chair. "But I meant to tell her so much, — to show her I was not a soldier of fortune, that I had something to offer the heiress of the Pasture. I don't see how it is; as she complains, I have said nothing."

"Has he said nothing, Annetje?" teased my lady.

"He knew" — the girl answered Neal's speech, and not her cousin's — "that to give me himself was to give me all, and I must be satisfied."

Thus they wooed each other in the shy third person, with my lady as go-between. Her presence seemed to touch their tremulous bliss with the matter of fact that so unreal a dream as a love tale demands to bring it into the sunlight of every day.

Neal asked presently for Mary, to complete the family group. The women strove vainly to check his clumsy plans, and he dispatched a slave to seek her. "I cannot take time to go," said he, and laughed down at Annetje.

The negro returned, after some delay, with word that Miss Loveland had been called to Albany. She left no message; nobody could tell where she had gone, nor were these three free of mind to speculate upon the cause of her absence.

Neal spent the day at the Pasture. He and Annetje sat by my lady's chair until she feigned drowsiness, sending them to stroll in the apple orchard while she took her nap, she said.

Yet there was no sleep in those bright black eyes that watched their departure, no repose in the sigh she gave and the tears she dried with her bony knuckles. She had been hearing the tale of Neal's reward for the danger he assumed with the dress of the Black Gown. She remembered the Pasture and the Loveland patent, which must come now to Barent Kierstiede's daughter.

"After all," the lonely old woman concluded, "they have enough in their love and their youth. As Annetje says, she did not need wealth to be satisfied."

Pacing to and fro between the lines of apple-trees, Neal and Annetje talked of many things, as he talked only to her, — of his past and his future, of his ideals, of what she was to him. He did not speak of Eve, nor contrast his boyish passion with the choice of manhood. He could never again speak willingly of Eve.

She understood, she always understood, he told her, and added, in the nearest approach his chivalry could bring him to a comparison: "Wherein is it, do you suppose, dear, there lies the difference between you and — and other girls? Once I might have made love to them and been content. With you I make love, too, do I not?"

"Yes," Annetje smiled up at him as he held her in his arms, "and very pretty love."

Neal was frowning in the effort to make his thought clear. "But that is not all of it. You are my friend no less than my sweetheart. Do you see what I mean? I hold you here, and it makes my heart leap in my breast to feel your head against it. Moreover, we share our ideas with each other, as if we were good comrades. I have confided in you what no one else has listened to. Why, we have even discussed politics since we came out into the orchard!"

They laughed softly together. "I know," said Annetje. "We love each other, and we like each other as well. I believe a marriage should take place, and that there are happy husband and wife, only where they who wed must have been friends if they had not been lovers. The first time we

met I asked a favor of you, as if you were a member of my company."

"And the second time we met," Neal answered, "I adopted you as my cousin. Yes, that shows!"

He was considering this, as he cantered back from the Bush that night. He could tell himself what he might never put into words, — he owed Cecil Loveland's memory an immeasurable debt in that his old-time rival had saved him from the blind preference of a boy, leaving him free — for Annetje. He shuddered as he realized that but for the other's treachery he might be going home to Eve — "poor Eve," he added instantly.

When he rode into the grassy yard of his father's house, it was Eve who came out, as she had come twenty-four hours earlier, to meet him. He bit his lip impatiently at sight of her. Thereupon he berated himself beneath his breath, and sprang from Dobbin's back, calling out some greeting.

She had changed her black dress for one of shimmering silk, although Neal did not notice that. She stood close to the horse, on whose velvet nose she placed one hand, stroking it while she spoke.

"Cecil has come back," she announced.

"Come back! What do you mean? Are you out of your mind, Eve? Cecil is dead."

"No," Eve answered steadily, "he is not dead. The French took him prisoner, but he escaped, and has been to La Presentation since you saw him. Ah, you don't believe me," — she took Neal's

amazement for incredulity, — "nor could I make him believe at first that your wound was not fatal; that you were alive. He said it was a lie. He was like a child. He said over and over again that it was a lie. Is n't it comical?"

She laughed to show how comical it was.

"I trust your husband found — what he sought at La Presentation," Neal observed. It struck him, in forming the sentence, as grotesque that this was the utmost he could say concerning Cecil's return.

Eve shook her head. "He has brought nothing but himself. His mother is dead, — that is true, if you like. She held a secret which meant a great deal to us. Her old father is ignorant of it, and the one man who had been told has disappeared. Cecil thinks he was killed on his way south with our papers. It is very hard on us, — I said so to Cecil."

Her low-pitched voice ceased for an instant. After that she went on: "I supposed it was ended. When I heard I was a widow, my first thought was, It is ended. Things don't happen like that, do they? They go on and on, and one lives to be old, and they go on."

Neal made no reply. Something in the silence recalled what had been her husband's comments when Mary answered his summons that morning, and told him of Annetje and Neal.

"But you are happy," said Eve.

It was not a question. He might evade the speech. Pity for her would have repressed him,

had not loyalty to another woman been stronger than his compassion.

"Yes," he told her, "I am the happiest man under those stars to-night."

She went into the house, and left him under the stars with his happiness.

The Riverside Press
Electrotyped and printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.
Cambridge, Mass, U. S. A.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 09874 188 5